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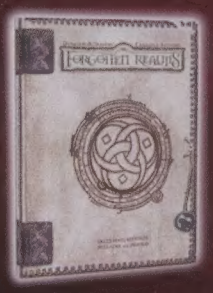

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RIGHT: Paintings inspired by the legend of King Arthur and Camelot are featured in the Gallery. This tapestry panel depicting the Knights of the Round Table leaving on a quest for the Holy Grail was designed by Arthur Burne-Jones.

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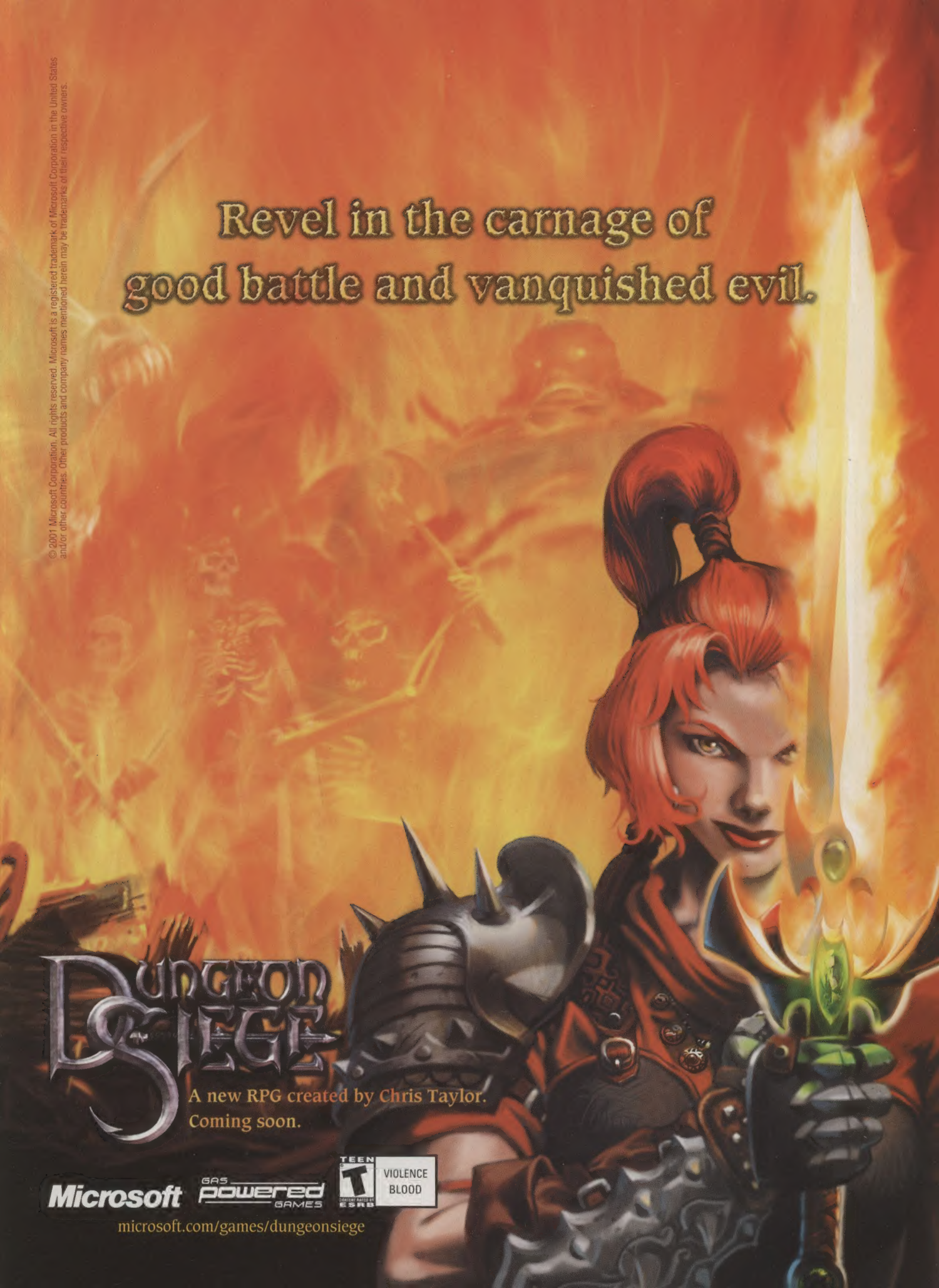

editorial

Really, it's an honor just to be nominated (and other lies).

Well, the 2001 Nebula Awards banquet took place last weekend (as I write this, anyway) in LA. Two stories from *Realms* were nominated, but alas, neither won. Now, I'm not blaming you for this unfortunate turn of events, as probably not too many of you are SFWA members, who are the only ones allowed to nominate and vote on the Nebulas.

However, the Hugos are next in line, and they are an entirely different story. The Hugos are nominated and voted on strictly by you, the fans. All you need to do is purchase a supporting membership to the Worldcon, and you too can influence the voting. Don't get too excited, though, guys—it's too late for this year. The 2001 Hugo ballot has just been posted, and not a single story, out of all the fabulous and wonderful stories published in *Realms* this year, was nominated. (Nor, for that matter, was its charming, talented, and perspicacious editor, but that's another column.)

So to prevent this sad turn of events from repeating itself next year, let's have a little lesson on how the Hugos work. Every year around Labor Day, the World Science Fiction Society meets at a giant convention called the Worldcon. Last year it was in Chicago; this year, it's in Philadelphia. (Sometimes they have it in England or Australia, but as far as any actual *World* in Worldcon, it's always in an English-speaking country.) To attend the Worldcon, which you might very well like to do, you need to purchase a membership. This can happen at any time during the year—

for instance, if you want to attend this year's Worldcon in Philly, all you need to do is go to www.philcon.org and sign up. Once you're a member, you can not only vote on the Hugos, but, if you join early enough, you can nominate them as well. That's what we need to discuss. While the Hugos are nominally a Science Fiction award, plenty of Fantasy gets nominated and wins as well. For instance, this year George R.R. Martin's monumentally fabulous *A Storm of Swords* is nominated, along with Harry Potter. So your favorite *Realms* stories would certainly fit the requirements, should you see fit to actually NOMINATE THEM!! Once you're a Worldcon member, you are automatically on the mailing list for the next year's event, and if it's being held in some inconvenient, far-off locale, you can buy a supporting membership and still take part in the nominating and voting process.

So let's get on the stick, people! It's too late for this year, but I'm getting tired of *Realms* being the redheaded stepchild of fiction magazines (apologies to any actual redheaded stepchildren who might be reading this—it's just an expression …). We want a Hugo, and we want it now! Well, this time next year, anyway … ❧

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DEALER INQUIRES WELCOME!

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

Having just read *Realms of Fantasy* for the first time I want to congratulate all of you on a fine magazine. I enjoyed the clever guest editorial, "The Life of a Gamer's Wife." While all the stories were good, "The Golem" was superior. It was nice to read about the authentically researched background of one city involved in the Holocaust that we don't hear about. The development of "The Golem" was touching and profoundly satisfying by the end. However, I cannot resist nitpicking the one error I did spot. There are references to the stack of antique books, one of which is The Talmud. Am I mistaken or doesn't The Talmud consist of many volumes of commentary, not just one? Anyway, thanks for a great issue!

Marian

Author Naomi Kritzer responds:

Marian is absolutely correct. The Talmud is a multivolume set of books (and a big one, at that). What I should have said was that Hanna and Alena had a single volume from an antique Talmud. I am very happy to know that this reader enjoyed the story!

Dear *Realms of Fantasy,*

As a faithful *Realms* subscriber, I would like to commend you on your wonderfully accurate section that I always enjoy reading: Folkroots. Not only were you fortunate to nab an incredible Fantasy writer, Terri Windling, but as a result of her literary talent and excellence, your origins and history, what brings us to your magazine is pure enjoyment of Fantasy's magic and allure. Having read the latest that Ms. Windling wrote in Folkroots, I would also like to say that "Victorian Fantasies: England's Golden Age of Fairy Art, Literature, and Drama" was the most informative Folkroots article I have read in the past three years of my subscription. In fact, I am using it as a reference in a forthcoming English class essay. Suffice it to say, Folkroots always has something of merit and is definitely worth citing as a reference. Thank you, *Realms of Fantasy,* for Folkroots in particular, and thank you, Ms. Windling, for your contributions …

Sincerely,
Beth Ross

Dear Shawna,

After reading the April 2001 issue of *Realms,* I was amazed at the great Sci-Fi/Fantasy shows that will be on TV. You have persuaded me … I want to see SCI FI Channel's *The Secret Adventures of Jules Verne.* I have always been a fan favorite of Jules Verne and the SCI FI Channel seems to do so well with their shows. *Relic Hunter* and *Black Scorpion* also sound promising. In fact, *Black Scorpion* was once a movie and I am happy to hear it is coming back as a TV series. I have been sad knowing that *Xena* and *Star Trek: Voyager* are coming to a close … but with shows like *Queen of Swords* coming on board, I should be OK. Thank you for providing this information in your magazine.

Paul Dale Roberts
Elk Grove, CA

Dear *Realms of Fantasy,*

I am a huge fan of Fantasy writing. However, the stories that have found their way into your magazine are not the sort of "happy" Fantasy stories that I like to read. Why all the stories about blood and death? It seems as though this magazine is catering to devil worshippers and serial killers. I want to see stories about princes and magic. I want to see things with happy, magical endings. Maybe you could get Piers Anthony to write a story!

Kristi

Kristi—have you seen the June 2001 issue? I do not think you will feel disappointed.

Dear *Realms,*

I have finally had enough. I thought I would just read the letters column through the years, hear what people have to say, and then enjoy (or not) your absolutely wonderful magazine. But today, I've cracked! And I really need to rant a bit. THE COVERS. I love the cover art! I love the Gallery feature! And guess what? I am a 28-year-old housewife who even (gasp) likes the big-chested women in way too little armor that no warrior of any realm or generation would be caught dead in. Fantasy and Science Fiction art are a wonderful part of the art world. They bring dreams and nightmares into actual view. I cherish the artists in this world, as well as authors (even the ones I am not fond of) for giving us enrichment in many different forms. If you don't like the cover to a magazine—fine. I hope those that hate a certain picture can at least appreciate that it does not take away from a written piece. And, if somehow a cover causes an individual not familiar with the magazine to stop and buy it—that cover has just added to the payrolls of authors, editors, receptionists, and everyone involved in the magazine—thus ensuring its continued existence. I was terribly unhappy when *Science Fiction Age* ended. I have been a subscriber to both magazines since their inception. If just a few more people had been drawn in by some provocative cover art perhaps *SciFi Age* might have continued longer. The best way for any organization to survive is to have a broad customer base. This means appealing to all kinds of tastes. Get over it, people! It is great that you have been moved to write a letter, but please don't let this get in the way of your purchasing the magazine! Move along and read it. Be happy for a chance to read it in the first place. There, I feel better. Thanks to all who work at *Realms.* May it continue for many years to come!

Christine Curphey
Vacaville, CA

Dear Shawna and Bryan Jones,

I would like to remind you both that the Dragonlance series is based upon one of TSR's *Dungeons & Dragons* role-playing worlds. So Weiss and Hickman had as much, if not more, boundaries placed on their world to keep it in harmony with the game. I hate to disappoint Mr. Jones, but when I was at work on my bachelor's degree in English, Science Fiction and Fantasy novels were never mentioned. However, I was fortunate enough to have an extremely open-minded adviser for my senior thesis, and she allowed me to devise a manner to use literary criticism on role-playing games as books and the actual game sessions. So have hope that someday Science Fiction and Fantasy books will get the attention so rightly deserved.

Deborah Cutler

Thank goodness for open-minded advisers!

Dear *Realms of Fantasy,*

I was very pleased to see the glowing recommendation for Carol Kendall's book, *The Gammage Cup,* on page 28 of the June 2001 issue, but was so disappointed to see that you made a mistake when listing its title (you listed it as *The Grimmage Cup*). This has remained one of my very favorite books since it was new (and I was a child) in 1959. I was so happy to see it reissued and would hate to have anyone miss out on finding it, simply because of your typo in the title.

Steve Clark
Topeka, Kansas

Our apologies for the error.

Dear *Realms of Fantasy,*

I regret that I have only just discovered your excellent magazine hidden away on the shelves of my local newsagent! I have read the August and December 2000 issues with great interest and enjoyment. Terri Windling's Folkroots on Snow White and *Les contes de fees* particularly enthralled me. I also loved Bruce Glassco's original treatment of the neglected "Thrushbeard" tale. How refreshing to discover that the fairy tale is treated seriously as a literary form in your magazine!

Jennifer S. Manning
Kent, England

Your letters are welcome. Send them to: Letters to the Editor, Realms of Fantasy, *P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760. Or better yet, e-mail to: shawnam896@aol.com*

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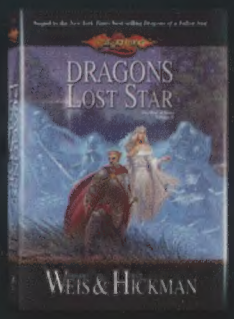

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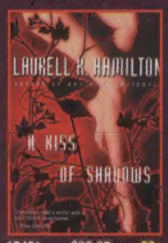

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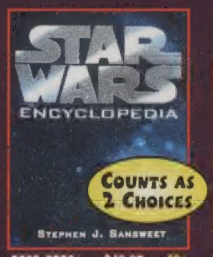

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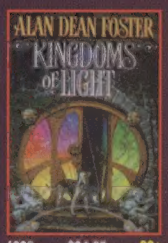

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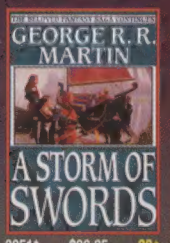

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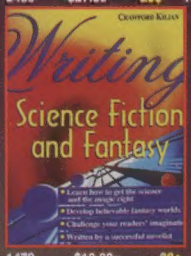

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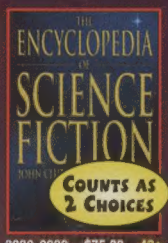

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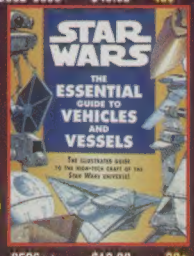

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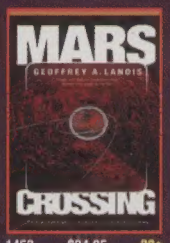

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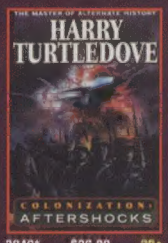

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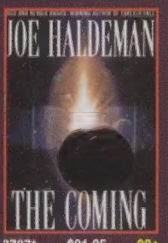

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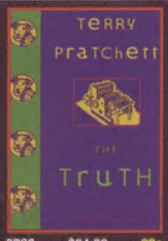

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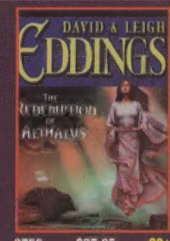

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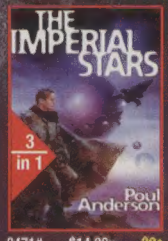

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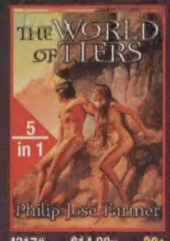

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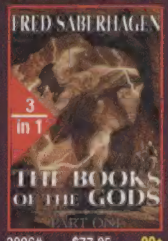

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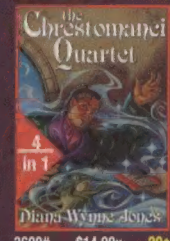

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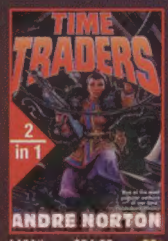

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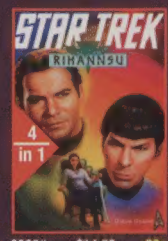

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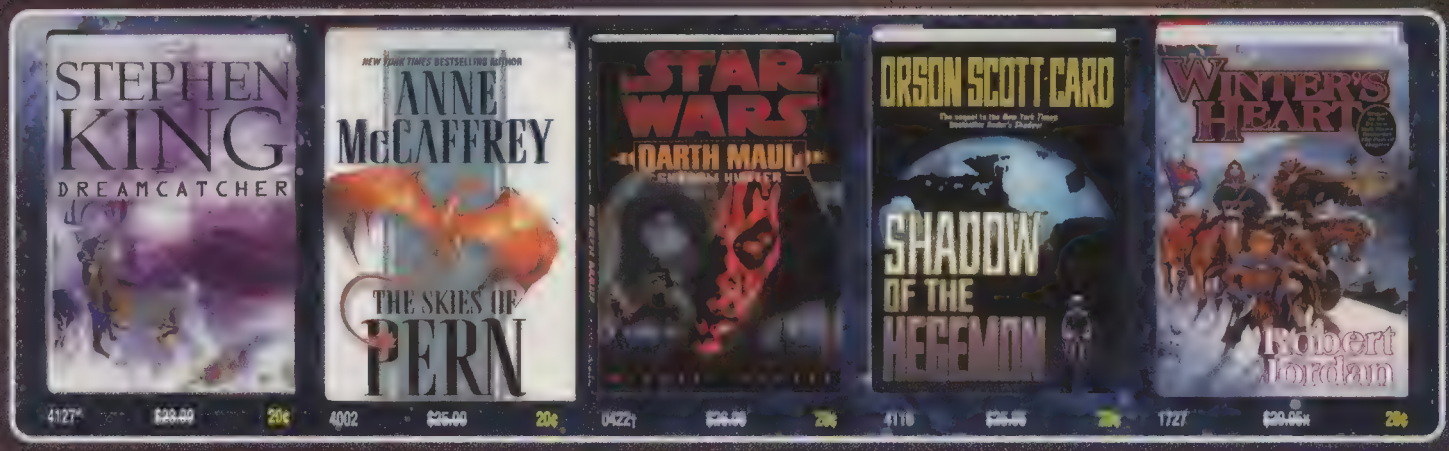

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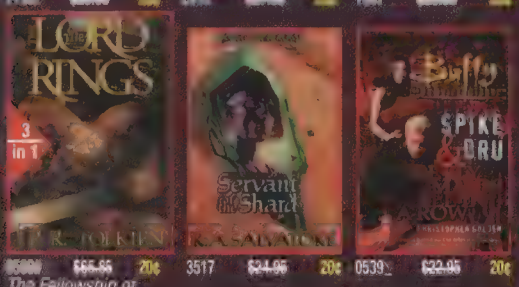

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THE Science Fiction BOOK CLUB

By Resa Nelson

The Mists of Avalon comes to life this summer in a new TNT miniseries.

It begins with the white mists that hover over the slowly rippling waters of the lake. Gradually, a small boat emerges through the mist. A dark-haired woman stands stoically at the prow as the strange, silent oarsmen behind her slip their paddles into the water. She is Morgaine, sister of King Arthur and mother of Mordred, the man who ultimately brings about the demise of Camelot and King Arthur's Round Table, and the death of the Arthurian dream.

Thus begins TNT's four-hour miniseries, *The Mists of Avalon*, slated to premiere in July. Based on the well-loved novel by Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon* tells not only the story of the women who brought King Arthur to power, but of the struggle between Christianity and Druidism in medieval times. It is a retelling of the Arthurian legend from a woman's point of view, underlined by the clash between one religion that restricted women and another religion that honored them.

The Mists of Avalon is primarily the story of Morgaine, played by Emmy-winner Julianna Margulies (*Dinosaur* and TV's *ER*). As a young girl, Morgaine is the only child of Igraine and her Roman warrior husband, Gorlois. Morgaine is, at first, a source of comfort to her mother, who had married Gorlois in an effort to strengthen allegiances between her people and Rome. However, Igraine is a daughter of the Holy Isle, Avalon, which is a magic place that serves as a safe haven for Druid priestesses, and yet co-exists on the border of the same time and space of a Christian convent.

The fates of both Igraine and Morgaine take a drastic turn at the hands of Merlin and Viviane, the Lady of the Lake, who see that Britain is in danger—the Romans, who could protect them, are withdrawing their support. Without a leader who can command all of Britain as a single nation, its people risk being overcome by Saxon barbarians. Merlin and Viviane have looked into the future to discover that the not-yet-born Arthur will be the king who must lead Britain and save its people. Igraine is destined to be Arthur's mother. But her husband will not be Arthur's father. Believing that the different tribes of Britain will only follow one of their own, Merlin and Viviane inform Igraine that the father of the next king of England will be Uther Pendragon.

Julianna Margulies stars as Morgaine in a four-hour mini- series based on Marion Zimmer Bradley's beloved novel.

The wheels are set in motion, and Igraine eventually marries Pendragon and bears their son, Arthur. But when they're still children, Arthur is sent to a foster family and Morgaine is sent to Avalon, where she learns to be a Druid priestess. She doesn't see her brother again until they're both adults. And when they meet, they don't recognize each other until it's too late.

In traditional Arthurian legend, Morgaine (known as Morgan Le Fey) is painted as an evil sorceress who seduces Arthur. But here, we come to know and understand Morgaine as a woman who is struggling to live her life the best way she knows how. Her encounter with Arthur is part of a Druidic

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tradition, and their roles are determined, once again, by Merlin and Viviane. And from that point on, the destiny of King Arthur slowly unravels.

Filmed in Prague, *The Mists of Avalon* is a lush, rich production that showcases three of the finest female actors of our time in the most pivotal roles: Anjelica Huston (*The Witches, The Addams Family,* and *Ever After*) plays Viviane, the Lady of the Lake; Joan Allen (*Pleasantville, The Crucible,* and *The Contender*) plays Morgaine's aunt Morgause; and Julianna Margulies is cast perfectly as Morgaine.

Margulies not only grew up in England, but her parents read stories of King Arthur to her at bedtime. She describes why she decided to accept the role of Morgaine and how she prepared. "I was interested mostly because the King Arthur tales had never been told from the woman's point of view. I thought that the new millennium was a great time to tell the story all over again.

"I read the script, and then when I decided to take the role, I got Marion Zimmer Bradley's book and read it. I also read up on the Druids, and the other King Arthur tales. I read about Glastonbury and those times. Men who knew I was taking the part kept giving me *The Once and Future King*. 'Here's the real story,' they would say, which I thought was kind of interesting. Men see the legend very differently.

"What I tried hardest to do was to hear Morgaine's voice and her soul. I wanted to bring her spirit to life, and I hope that comes through."

Huston, who grew up in Ireland where she lived in 10th-century Norman castles, also has a personal interest in the Arthurian legend. "We didn't have television," she says. "We read a lot, and the tales of Merlin were often read in our household. My brother was a huge Arthur and Merlin aficionado. I wasn't that interested at the time, but when this movie came along it revived my interest in the whole subject. My brother is actually a master falconer—probably as a result of being so interested in the Arthurian tales."

But the actor with perhaps the deepest interest is Samantha Mathis (*How to Make an American Quilt* and TV's *Harsh Realm*), who plays Gwenhwyfar. "I read the book *The Mists of Avalon* about 10 years ago and fell in love with it. After I finished it, I called my agent and said it had to be made into a movie. There are just so many extraordinary roles for women of all ages. I followed it through the years, inquiring about what was happening with it and who was making it. My role in the film was meant to be, I suppose."

So how did *The Mists of Avalon* come to the screen?

It began with executive producer Lisa Alexander, who worked in development for the production company of fellow executive producer James Coburn (*Affliction*). She loved the book and brought it to Coburn's attention. "It's interesting because he has such a tough- guy image—you know, Westerns and all of that," Alexander says. "But Jim has long had an interest in Eastern religion. I think that's what appealed to him about this project. For me, he's very much symbolized the Merlin and Druid point of view in this. I feel it has been very good for the project, too, because I didn't think that only women should see it through."

Morgaine (Margulies) and Arthur (Atterton) meet again as adults. RIGHT: King Arthur is played by Edward Atterton. OPPOSITE: Samantha Mathis (top) plays Gwenhwyfar and Anjelica Huston (bottom) plays Viviane.

To that end, director Uli Edel (*Last Exit to Brooklyn* and TNT's *Purgatory*) was brought on board. "[This project is] a great dream come true," Edel says. "Because I knew this was a very passionate story. The legend of King Arthur is most likely the greatest story in Europe.

"Many years ago, a friend of mine brought me a sword he had used in a movie. So I put the sword on the wall above the fireplace in my home and told my two boys that it was actually Excalibur. I made up a story that, in a dream, King Arthur had appeared and brought me Excalibur. They believed this story over the years. Now they know I made it up, but they tell their friends the story like I told them, because they want to believe in the myth, not in the truth.

"Most of the movies that deal with King Arthur are set in the 13th century in the High Middle Ages. But there was a man named King Arthur, and he lived much earlier. He lived in the real Dark Ages. So our movie plays in the Dark Ages, right after the Romans left Britain. It takes place around 600-700 AD, a time when Christianity and Paganism were still in a fight. A new religion was coming up and many people were holding on to the old religion.

"The clash of religions was what interested me most about this tale. However, we cannot really say 'Paganism.' There was a religion that existed—a Celtic religion which was connected with a Druid religion. Most of it is lost for us, because the Druids never wrote anything down. But it was a religion that existed for thousands of years. It was only seen from the Christian's standpoint as Paganism."

One of the greatest strengths of TNT's *The Mists of Avalon* is the attention that's paid to the struggle between religions. Executive producer Mark Wolper (*L.A. Confidential, Murder in the First*) talks about the role that religion plays in the story. "King Arthur's great goal was to keep a balance between Christianity and

Paganism. The only way England could hold its place against the Saxons was for all the Christians and all the Pagans to fight them off. They were unable to do that. The two religions could not co-exist. Arthur failed, and Camelot failed because of it. I don't think Paganism and Christianity could ever survive together, and it was a hopeless, romantic dream to think that they could. That's what this film is about. It's about a moment when it no longer worked, and the tragedy of the loss."

Mathis describes how her role as Gwenhwyfar plays into the religious conflict of the story. "In some ways she starts out quite sweet and naive and kind of angelic. But she grows into a strong woman who's really fighting for her belief in Christianity. She's surrounded by all these people who bow down to the goddess of magic, which is very disturbing to her. She doesn't intend to be evil and malicious, but she becomes so, and really loses sight of her Christian ideals, thinking that she's doing God's work. So I think she's a bit more complicated than the Guineveres we have seen before.

"She believes that being a mother is her only worth and value, and everyone knows she can't have a child. She keeps miscarrying, and it's devastating to her. She loves Arthur and feels that the only way she can keep a bond with him is to give him a son. And being a devout Christian, she doesn't understand why she keeps being punished."

One of the aspects that delineates the Druids from the Christians is the use of magic. The women of Avalon—Viviane, Morgaine, and Igraine—all have the Sight. They can see into the future. They can communicate with each other from great distances. The film ratchets the notion of magic up a notch or two, but not to the point of being overwhelming.

"We could have made *The Mists of Avalon* with spectacular effects," Alexander says. "Instead, we really took our cue from the story and have made it much subtler. This is a story that says that magic is not necessarily unknowable.

"In this story, magic is not considered evil. It is much more a source of strength and knowledge. The women are strong and independent. They know about herbs. They know about healing. They know how nature can help them, and that was often seen as a threat, just like it was with the Salem witch trials. It was really ignorance that saw magic as threatening and evil."

Margulies adds, "I think this movie is more about spirituality and belief than it is about sorcery or witchcraft. I really think this story is about Paganism versus Christianity, and the fears that we have about just allowing the Earth to be and not manipulating it."

Another strength of the production is the look and feel of the film. It has a strong medieval appearance and a great beauty at the same time.

Joan Allen says, "Uli, the director, wanted a primal, pagan aspect to infiltrate the film, the story, and the way people looked. The look of it is very gritty, grimy, and it's not romanticized."

Uli Edel's desire was to find a magical place to film the story. "I found it in Prague," Edel says. "There were great rock formations, which look very primal and very ancient. We also went there to build the castles. The castles we found in England were much too late—they are from the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries. So we had to create a whole world,

and we found a place in Prague where we could build Camelot."

Wolper adds, "This is one of the biggest sets that I've built on any film, and it represents the brilliance of our production designer who, along with Uli and myself, tried to conceive of a castle that was somewhat in keeping historically with what might have been Camelot. We had to build it from scratch."

Devout fans of Bradley's novel need to prepare themselves for one problem with the film. Although it stays true in many ways to the novel, the characters are sometimes watered down and sanitized. For example, in Bradley's novel, Igraine, little more than a child herself when Morgaine is born, takes refuge in her love for Morgaine while married to Gorlois. While Igraine appreciates that Gorlois tries to treat her fairly, she doesn't love him. She has essentially sacrificed herself by marrying him for the sake of her people.

And then Uther Pendragon enters the picture. Igraine is resistant to him at first. Even though she has no great love for Gorlois, Igraine takes her marriage vows seriously. However, she has a vision in which she sees herself in a past life with Pendragon, and she

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soon yields to an overpowering love for him. Once Gorlois is dead and Igraine is in Uther Pendragon's arms, he replaces Morgaine as the object of Igraine's affection. Igraine falls so madly and deeply in love with Pendragon that she ignores her daughter.

Therefore, when Viviane takes Morgaine away to Avalon, Igraine isn't even directly in the picture—Viviane barters with Uther Pendragon, not Igraine, for custody of Morgaine. Because Igraine has ignored Morgaine so much, it's difficult to imagine that Igraine would even notice Morgaine's absence for a while.

This is much of the power of Bradley's work. Her characters are deeply flawed and very human. Much of who Morgaine becomes is a result of her mother's sudden emotional abandonment.

However, this doesn't happen in TNT's miniseries. While we see that Igraine is drawn to Pendragon, we never see her transformation to hopeless, passionate love for him. Likewise, we never see a change in her relationship with Morgaine. In fact, Morgaine's departure for Avalon is tearful—Igraine dashes after Morgaine and is utterly distraught that she's leaving. It's a scene that's better suited for a daytime soap opera than a story based on a complex and intelligent novel.

While TNT's *The Mists of Avalon* is peppered with such dilution, it also strives to keep the story as true to the novel as possible. Doing true justice to the novel probably would have required a minimum of a 10-hour miniseries, and it was quite a feat to distill the story into a mere four hours. All things considered, it's a project that's well done and worth watching. And the filmmakers did make attempts to please fans of the novel.

Wolper says, "We had a lot of diehard fans read the script and give us their response to it. Across the board, they were all ecstatic about it. They regretted that we had to leave a lot out, but they did not dislike anything that we left in, so we feel extremely confident that they are going to love it. But our task is to get new fans for the book."

Alexander adds, "I hope they will like what we've done. A lot of them have approached me, and I'm aware that there is a huge following for this book. It's not just a big adventure story—it has a message. Avalon stands for nature, and living in harmony with nature, and these are values that we need to live by now. I think that is why it struck a chord with so many people. It isn't just another romantic tale. Everyone involved has tried very hard to stay with the essence of the book, and I'm really pleased with what we've accomplished.

"It's definitely not only a woman's film. The book is really weighted toward the women, and we were concerned that it would become a woman's piece. But Uli Edel is very much a guy. He has a wonderful sense of women, but he also really looked at the story and brought out the men. He approached it in such a way that he could make the men stronger, yet not have them become the story that's already been told. He also has chosen a very particular look with this piece. It's gritty and dark and dirty, which I think makes it more manly. There are also some great fight scenes, and we have a wonderful team of horses. So we have a lot of things that will appeal to men in the audience, as well."

TOP: Morgause (Joan Allen) and Morgaine (Margulies). LEFT: Viviane (Huston), the Lady of the Lake, escorts young Morgaine to Avalon. RIGHT: Joan Allen, as Morgause, surveys the Dark Ages recreation in the miniseries.

Caroline Goodall (*Hook*, *Cliffhanger*, and *Schindler's List*), who plays Igraine, offers her take on the Arthurian legend. "All the Celtic stories were handed down mouth to mouth, so no one knows for sure if Arthur really existed. If you go to Glastonbury, there is a well there they call the Chalice Well, which is also known as the red spring. This is included in the book *The Mists of Avalon*. The water comes out red, because there is a lot of iron in it. But the water is supposed to have magical healing powers, and even in the 16th century there were pilgrims who would go there to drink the water for healing.

"They say that Avalon is this island that included Glastonbury. There is an extraordinary hill called the Bride's Mound that has these wonderful curves, and within these curves you are meant to be able to see the body of the fire goddess giving birth. It's a very female kind of place, and it is said to have been the gateway to Avalon. There are remains of a settlement there that they've dated back to 400 AD. So who knows? There were definitely priests and priestesses of the old religion living there." ❧

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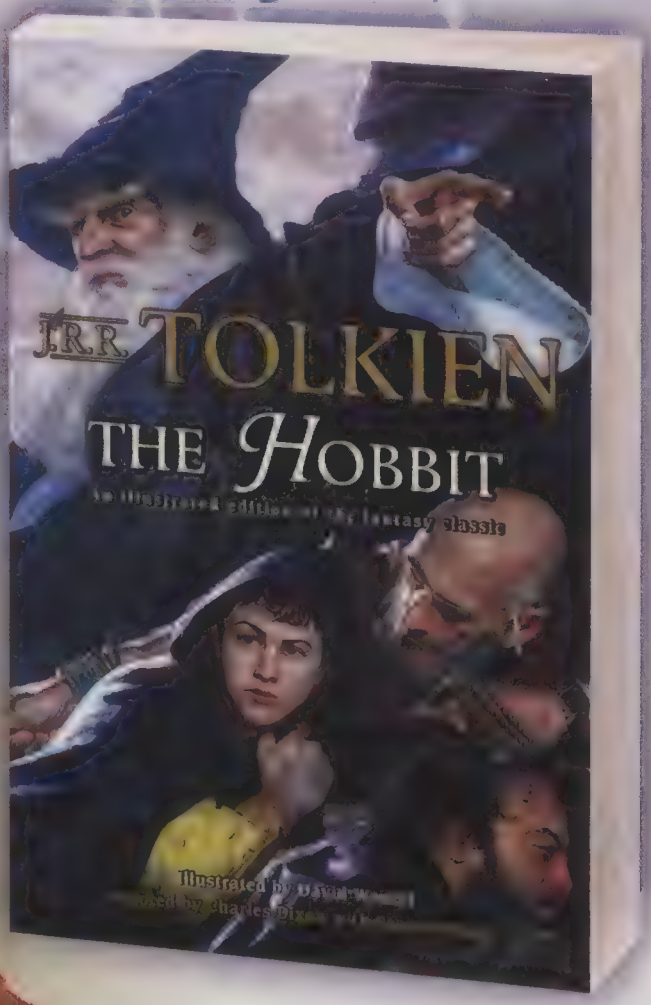

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By Gregory Frost

The Tale of the Puzzle of the Tales: The Thousand and One Nights Live On.

Dunyâzâd said to her sister, "Tell us one of your lovely stories." To which Shahrazâd replied, "With the greatest of pleasure ..."

The Arabian Nights

If someone says those three words to you, what do you think of? Aladdin and his Magical Lamp, either in the flesh or in Disneyesque celluloid with an overly garrulous genie? Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, perhaps, complete with the cave that only reveals itself in response to the phrase "Open, Sesame"? Maybe you recall Sinbad the Sailor, whose voyages have been fodder for some Ray Harryhausen extravaganzas, and even a feature-length Popeye cartoon that's a real standout in the history of Max Fleischer animations. Undoubtedly, given a minute or so, you'll come to clever Shahrazâd and her tales that kept a sultan from having her beheaded night after night until finally, after a good thousand of them, he changed his mind and married her instead.

Princess Parizade Bringing Home the Singing Tree (The Talking Bird) *by Maxfield Parrish, from a 1909 edition of* The Arabian Nights.

Four famous stories in the history of fairy tales. Guess what, though? Only one of them actually belongs to the core group of stories that make up the *Alf Laylah wa Laylah*, *The Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. The other three are accretions (or even, possibly, frauds), added to the body of tales later and, for the most part, in order to stretch their length to encompass a thousand nights.

Essentially, everything you think you know about *The Arabian Nights* is probably wrong. Even the number of nights and stories. The history of the tales is itself an enormous puzzle.

Yet no other body of work in the history of the Orient—from Africa to India to China—has had the influence upon Western culture that these tales have had. And that's true even though we know so little about most of them. What I'll attempt to do in this article is piece together the puzzle of *The Arabian Nights*, and hopefully present you with a clearer picture of how it came to be.

I. Origins

The Arabian Nights comprises tales of Persian, Indian, and Arabic origins, which began as oral tales, adapting to various times and cultures as they evolved. The stories did not originate together, either. Tellers probably fashioned them to their audience. A story that stood on its own for years might have reminded one teller of another story, so that he or she fitted it onto the first, and soon the first had swallowed the second, becoming a single, flowing narrative. Characters and events blended, taking on a new shape, and then at some point, years or decades later—and maybe in a different country—someone else attached still another, similar story to this new compound, and before you knew it, you had "The Story of the Fisherman and the Demon," which incorporated "The Tale of King Yunan and the Sage Duban," which itself incorporated "The Tale of the Husband and Parrot," which led to "The Tale of the King's Son and the She-Ghoul."

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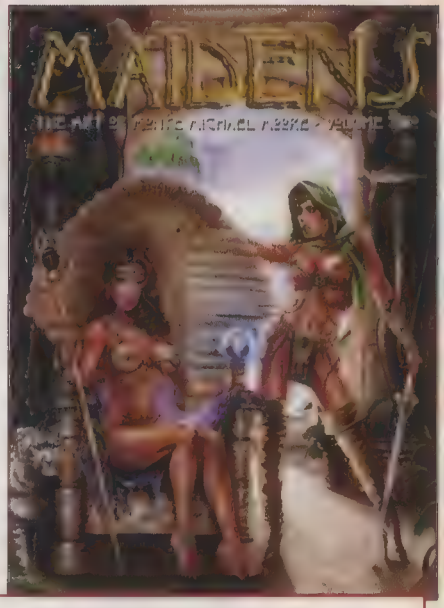

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You have a story within a story within a story and so on and so forth.

These compound stories are themselves set within that most famous of framing stories about a king named Shahrayar, who discovers that his wife has betrayed him and decides therefore that no woman can be considered trustworthy. He dispatches her, then sets about deflowering a different woman every night, and the following morning has her executed. This king has a vizier who has a beautiful, nubile daughter named Shahrazâd, who insists over her father's protests that she must take her turn in this terrible terminal roulette. However, she has a plan to break the chain of events and rescue herself, her servant, Dunyâzâd (who in later versions becomes her sister), and all the remaining women sure to fall victim to the lethal king. In bed with him, having like her predecessors been deprived of her virginity, she serves up a story, which she narrates in casual fashion so that at a critical point in the tale, morning arrives. She suspends her narrative. The king, of course, cannot kill her or he'll never hear how the story turns out. So he spares her, and the following night, Dunyâzâd requests that the tale be concluded. Shahrazâd obediently picks up the story and continues. Somehow she manages to thread this story through the remaining night without reaching the desired conclusion by morning. Instead of coming to a tidy resolution, the story unfolds into another story, and that into another. Quickly the pattern is established, and even the most foolish king must realize this is going to go on for a very long time—for a thousand nights at least. But Shahrazâd is so superb a storyteller, Shahrayar *must* have her continue. Storytelling has become a magical art.

The tale of Shahrazâd and her stories was at first called *The Thousand Nights*, a title itself derived from the Persian *Hazar Afsaneh*, *The Thousand Tales (*or *Legends)*. How it became *The Thousand Nights and a Night* is unclear, although one possibility is that the extra night was added because odd numbers are associated with good fortune in Arabic culture.

Earliest mention of a text that's identifiable as an antecedent of the work comes in a 9th- Century manuscript. It names our storyteller, Shahrazâd, and her slave Dunyâzâd, who asks her mistress to tell a story. The pieces of the puzzle are already assembling.

In the 10th century, two writers reference the *Alf Laylah*, describing the frame story once again. Dunyâzâd is still identified as Shahrazâd's slave at this point. These tantalizing glimpses are almost all we have for the next seven hundred years. Surviving records from a 12th-century Jewish bookseller in Cairo lists a copy of a book, *The Thousand and One Nights*, as having been out on loan. This may be the first mention of the title as we have it today, and we have it courtesy of a lending library, as it were, from the 1100s.

ABOVE: Two illustrations by Edmund Dulac, from Stories from the Arabian Nights.
BELOW: Ali Baba by Aubrey Beardsley, from the cover design for Forty Thieves.

The stories continued to circulate through the Arab world, metamorphosing, and absorbing pieces of other, similar works, and finally splitting into three main identifiable branches—the aforementioned Persian, Indian, and Arabic. A 13th-century version of the *Nights*, from either Syria or Egypt, is lost, as is a copy made of it a generation later.

The oldest *surviving* manuscript is Syrian. It dates to the 14th century, and compared to the surviving Egyptian manuscripts—the oldest of which dates to the 16th century—it is a conservative document. In Egypt, it seems, a real attempt was made to fill all one thousand and one nights by stuffing more and more stories into the framework. Some more ambitious copyists resorted to composing their own stories, forgeries in the style of the other tales. According to one of the more recent and accurate translators, Husain Haddawy, the most famous of these forgeries is "The Tale of 'Ala al-Din and The Magic Lamp."

Aladdin and his lamp are fakes.

Despite its title, the book really only contains at most some 300-odd nights' worth of stories (Haddawy's superior translation of the core stories concludes after 271). That isn't 300 *stories*, either. Shahrazâd was keeping the king on a hook that she baited by withholding the ending of her story night after night. Sometimes an individual story would be told for five nights running without reaching a conclusion. What that number—*One Thousand* or *One Thousand and One—really* represents is a succinct way of saying "an awful lot of nights."

II. Translations

So one 14th-century manuscript survived. But nothing was done with it until it wound up in the hands of a Frenchman early in the 18th century.

France had just undergone its first love affair with what we now call fairy tales. Over the past few decades, the salon society of Madame Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, Mlle. L'Héritier, Charles Perault (Mlle. L'Heritier's uncle), and others had produced an incredible and increasingly popular body of *contes de fee*—fairy stories. These stories had circulated in the salons for about 50 years before being published. By the close of the 17th century, they were well documented, the salons in which they'd been created had run their course, and most of the women who'd fashioned tales such as "Rapunzel," and "Sleeping Beauty" were dead. France needed a new enchantment.

In 1704, a scholar named Antoine Galland provided it when he published the first edition of his translation of the *Alf Laylah wa Laylah*. Galland's source was that 14th-century Syrian manuscript, now considered to be the most authentic and least enhanced we have. It resides today in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

Galland had a remarkable gift for language. He was fluent in Turkish, Greek, Arabic, and

Persian, making him in many ways the perfect translator for this body of work. Nevertheless, he did not simply translate the manuscript, but made alterations and revisions in order to create his own version of it that he deemed suitable for the French public. He must have understood very well what his public wanted, because the book became a sensation, fueling a second phase in the French celebration of the fairy tale, and an even broader fascination with all things Middle Eastern. Curiously, while it received enormous popular acclaim, the book was ignored critically at the time.

Everything that happened to the *Nights* subsequently describes a phenomenon limited to European civilization. For, while numerous Arabic translations followed in the next century, the culture from which the stories sprang did not hold them in any particular esteem. Its celebration has been largely a Western event, part of what has been called an "Oriental Renaissance."

Within a few years of its publication, there was an English translation of Galland's interpretation, and soon other "translations" of these translations appeared. Some were frauds in imitation of the style or substance of the tales. But even the second-rate translations proved inspiring to a generation of artists and poets. As Hussain Haddawy puts it: "The *Nights* could shine in the dark."

That's what they had to do in the century following Galland.

Subsequent English translators of the stories—Edward Lane, John Payne, and Sir Richard Burton—did not abide by the 14th-century Syrian manuscript that Galland had used. By the time Lane created his version, in 1839, a variety of reconfigured Arabic translations had appeared to muddy the waters.

The first of these, known as the first *Calcutta* edition and finished in 1818, combined the core tales arbitrarily with other stories, and in an elevated language that was supposed to make them more literary, more valid. The editor of the *Calcutta* edition probably deleted as much as he added.

The next edition, the *Breslau*, combined the Syrian with Egyptian stories, and appeared in eight volumes between 1824 and 1843. As I've already mentioned, the Egyptians had gone to some lengths to complete those thousand nights, and so the *Breslau* proved larger than the first *Calcutta* edition, filling a total of eight volumes.

After that came the *Bulaq*, based entirely on an Egyptian rendering, and once again edited to embellish, cut, and "improve" the quality of the language but conflating the tales with other stories. This was followed by a second *Calcutta* edition in 1842, which had multiple editors who again saw fit to clean it up, reinterpret, and play havoc with the tales.

No doubt the creators of these editions meant well in their endeavors to fix up and polish the stories. But they had in effect taken the pieces of our puzzle and drawn new pictures on them.

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The English translators made matters worse. Lane expurgated the tales, removing what he considered to be inappropriate material. He used the first *Calcutta*, *Breslau*, and *Bulaq* translations, mixing in whichever stories he chose while overlooking others altogether. Payne relied on the second *Calcutta* and the *Breslau* for his work, and similarly cut and pasted from them. For his, Burton used the *Bulaq*, second *Calcutta*, and *Breslau*. He sought to un-expurgate the tales, filling his pages with an involved gloss on sexual and social practices of the Arab world as he perceived them, and also complicating the language with his own magniloquence. None of these gentlemen attempted to compare the various translations and determine from such comparison what might and might not legitimately be considered part of the *Nights*. Instead, they mixed and matched according to their own preferences and prejudices. What we're left with is a hodgepodge of *Nights*, where—depending on whose version you read—stories are mistranslated, misrepresented, bowdlerized, embellished, or left out altogether.

Another by Edmund Dulac. The exotic stories appealed to Victorians.

In the introduction to his translation of the *Mahdi* edition of the 14th-century Syrian manuscript (which we'll come back to shortly), Hussain Haddawy gives numerous examples representative of the problems encountered even in the most well-intentioned texts. The Arabic language, he points out, depends upon diacritical marks and punctuation for proper interpretation and meaning. The translations upon which the English translators based their editions had left out most if not all of these marks, thus rendering some phrases open to arbitrary interpretation and others impossible to comprehend at all. In instances where the translators couldn't fathom the meaning, they often excised the phrase or sentence altogether. Try lopping a few sentences randomly from one of your own favorite stories and see how much sense it then makes.

For example, he says, the verb "to overtake" also means "to realize." Burton mistook the one for the other, and thus rendered the phrase "But morning overtook Shahrazâd and she lapsed into silence" as "And Shahrazâd perceived the dawn of the day and ceased saying her permitted say." Not a terrible mistranslation, except that it's repeated night after night after night throughout the work. Other, larger errors have a much greater impact upon the tales.

Haddawy does credit the English translators for doing as well as they did under the circumstances: Between them Burton, Lane, and Payne managed to assemble a remarkable amount of the puzzle.

Other translations followed on theirs, right up into the 20th century, but produced less satisfactory results.

III. Reassessments

In 1984, Muhsin Mahdi published a definitive translation of the 14th-century Syrian text that Galland had used in the 18th century for his work. Mahdi made repairs where necessary but didn't embellish as his predecessors had done, producing the most accurate version of the core stories to date. At the center of this edition are tales involving the historical figures of Caliph Hârûn al-Rashîd and his wise vizier, Ja-far.

Six years later, Husain Haddawy carefully translated Mahdi's work into English, thereby providing us with the most comprehensible and approachable edition yet of the *Nights*. It is great reading, without the overly embellished and convoluted prose that graces most of the other translations.

Haddawy supports the *Mahdi*'s position that the tales in the Syrian manuscript alone comprise the *true Alf Laylah wa Laylah*, and that the rest can either be dismissed as augmentations or, as with "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and His Two Sons," fragments.

While this is all undoubtedly true, it seems to me that it's a valid assessment from the perspective of a strict purist. That is, yes, we *should* be aware that such a proto-collection of stories exists, but that should not diminish our pleasure in reading all the other tales—the Sindbads, the 'Ala al-Din, the 'Ali Baba, and so forth. Haddawy himself bears this out in that a few years after rendering the *Mahdi* translation in English, he published a companion volume of four of the more familiar *Arabian Nights* augmentations.

At last we discover that the puzzle has no single absolute form and never did. Somehow this seems most appropriate.

The *Nights* have flamed the imaginations of writers and poets since the moment Antoine Galland set them down in French four hundred years ago. Contemporary writers such as Barth and Borges and Byatt continue to be charged by them. A Thousand and One Nights have lasted a thousand times that. I expect that clever Shahrazâd will still be unfolding her tales and watching for the dawn a thousand years hence. ❧

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Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! Step right up, step right up—you're not going to believe it till you see it! The world's greatest assemblage of monsters, screaming beauties, and insane scientists ever displayed between two covers! Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!

In ***Horror of the Century: An Illustrated History*** (Collector's Press, Inc., Portland, OR; hardcover; 256 pp.; $60.00), Robert Weinberg is sly enough to deliver his lecture in a chatty manner and lace it heavily with folksy colloquialisms, but right off the bat he hits us with Homer's *Odyssey,* Virgil's *Aeneid,* and Whoever-It-Was's *Beowulf!* We haven't opened the first two blood-red (and they really are *blood-red*) pages of Chapter 1 before he makes the point that we only managed to achieve "I Was a Teenage Frankenstein" and *Tales from the Crypt* by going through Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*—and he's got the covers to prove it; *he shows them to you in full color!*

The most astounding thing about this unabashedly gaudy, oversized compendium of Technicolor widescreen movie posters, gloriously gruesome covers from comic books and pulps, and much, much more is that it is a thoughtful and sincere work of scholarship.

He's not fooling around here, is Weinberg.

I'll bet you don't know offhand, for instance, that in 1957 Horror was brought back from the grave it had sunk into during the 1940s when Screen Gems bought the TV rights to the old Universal Karloff and Lugosi gems of the 1930s and showed them nationwide on *Shock Theater* right after the 11 o'clock TV news!

Are you aware that in the early days of Arkham House, the legendary publisher of Horror, August Derleth and Clark Ashton Smith's books easily outsold *The Outsider* by Howard Phillips Lovecraft in spite of the fact it only cost a lousy five bucks?

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Did you know that after the efforts of Dr. Frederick Wertham—during the period of McCarthyism and the Hollywood Blacklist—caused the closing down of EC Horror Comics there was absolutely no decline whatsoever in juvenile delinquency?

Well, maybe you could gave guessed that last one, but I guarantee that if you read this book you'll not only win endless bar bets, but you will also have a marvelous time.

Not to mention a marvelous book!

I have been very positively recommending the books of Graham Joyce to all kind enough to pay attention to this column since receiving the first of his books—if you missed those prior raves please let me once again assure all readers of *Realms of Fantasy* that they should on no account neglect to get their hands on and read *Dark Sister* and *The Tooth Fairy*—and now it is my happy duty to announce that Tor Books has just added a new title of his to their very welcome releases and that it is called ***Dreamside*** (Tor Books, NYC; trade paperback; 256 pp.; $14.95).

When I read the letter sent to me by Tor Books along with the book and learned that this is actually the very first novel the author wrote or at least had printed, I turned immediately and with great curiosity to that little publishing history they print on the page just before the dedication and discovered that it had been originally brought out way back in 1991 (Ah, those were the days!) by good old Pan Books in England. This in turn sent me to another page, the one that lists the author's prior works and is located just before the second title page (now and then I find myself wondering how all these things came to

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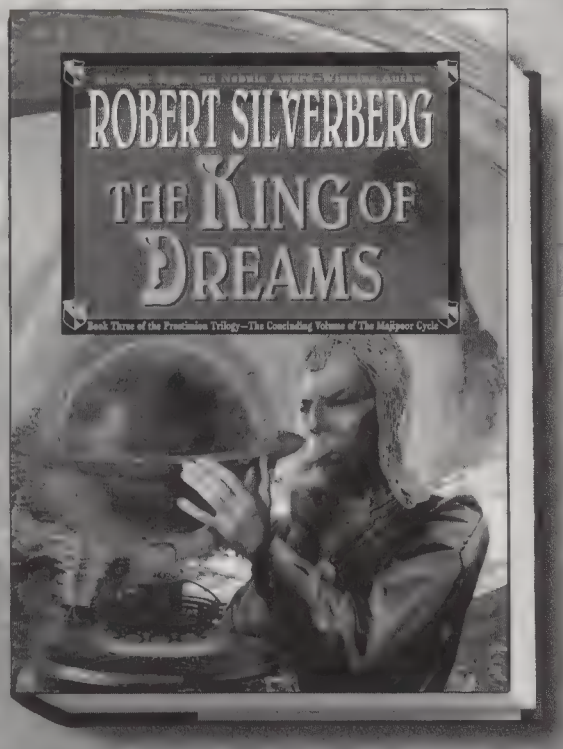

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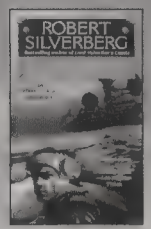

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be universally recognized as the only right and proper way to go about presenting a book!) and, after deducting the starred titles (all of which have been very kindly printed here in the United States by Tor for us Statelings), I realized with a little start of joy that we are fortunate enough to be able to look forward to either waiting for them to eventually bring out *House of Lost Dreams* (dare I suspect this may be a sequel to *Dreamside?)* and *The Stormwatcher,* or, if we have the energy and the means, to track down and buy the original British editions, be they Pan or be they otherwise. It's up to you, but I'd strongly recommend you do one or the other.

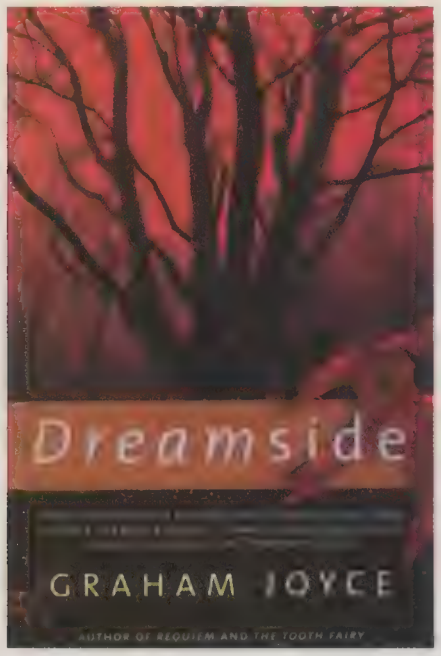
In any case, *Dreamside* demonstrates resoundingly that Joyce hit the literary road at full speed since it is every bit as good as the marvelous stuff he's generously shared with us since, and it would be a great shame if anyone delighting in good Fantasy, such as yourself, missed reading it.

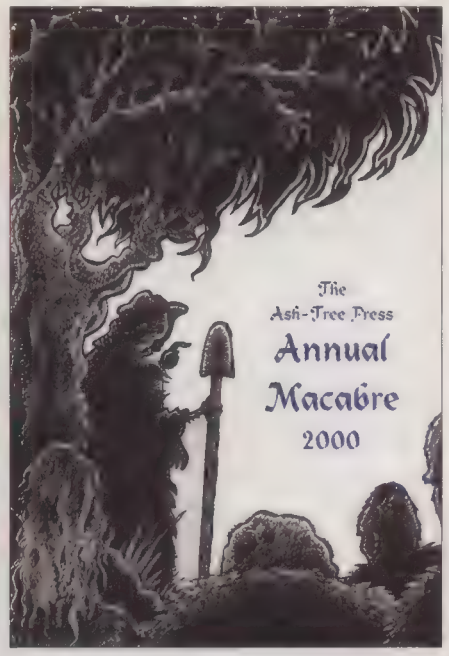
Dreamside spins the tale of four interestingly diverse university students who, among other young scholars, read and decide to accept the posted invitation of Professor L.P. Burns, head of the Department of Psychology, to participate in a "practical research experiment" that will investigate lucid dreaming, the commonly little-explored ability many of us have of consciously controlling our dreams.

These four consist of Ella, a stylish and dramatic dark beauty who enjoys toying with the exotic Bohemian lifestyle, incense, and all; Lee, an intelligent young fellow of vague ambition who joins the project entirely because Ella intends to do so and sensibly figures there might be a reasonable chance their mutual studies of dreams might lead to other, more intimate explorations just between them; Honora, a dreamy Irish girl and friend of Ella's who harbors a suspicion she may already be a lucid dreamer; and Brad, an ironic, not at all happy fellow who pretends to be a highly skilled lucid dreamer even after his hopes that joining Burns' extracurricular experiment might possibly involve some kind of payment are dashed.

Under the Professor's delicately effective urging, the students keep dream diaries recording the successes and/or failures of their attempts to use the various autosuggestive techniques he has taught them to help them consciously manipulate their dreaming and to meet on a regular basis to discuss the results of their efforts.

For a time long enough to be pretty discouraging for all save for the elderly scientist, the student experimenters fail to produce anything more than a few tall tales and wistful imaginings, but then comes a series of very encouraging breakthroughs by our four which push them dramatically ahead of the rest and convince Professor Burns to stop continuing the original group and carry on his investigations with the exclusive assistance of Ella, Lee, Honora, and Brad.





He drives the four of them out for a weekend to a little cottage he owns in the country, shows them a pretty little lake nearby, then tells them to stare at its ripples, wander its banks, and otherwise be-come intimately familiar with all its aspects, the idea being to make it into a mentally shared locale they will all be able to consciously incorporate into their lucid dreaming.

They return to the college and find that not only has this latest experiment met with remarkable success and provided them all with a more solid permanent platform for their explorations of "dreamside"—as they have all come to call it —they make the astounding and eerie discovery that it has also given them a place where their dreaming selves can gather together even though they sleep in separate beds in separate houses in widely separated towns!

Of course, since good stories are fun to tell, I'm tempted to go on about what happened then—and more of what happened before, since the college days' activities all take place in flashbacks from a sadder but wiser future point of view—but I think my stern duty is to leave you hanging.

Suffice it to say that, as in his previous books, Joyce not only spins a fantasy with hugely intriguing implications which you will enjoy mulling over for a long time to come (I know I'm still happily mulling), he also presents you with a very convincingly alive group of people who will not only keep you interested in them as they reach their differing fates, but whose triumphs and blunders are likely to be instructively helpful to you as you make your own perilous way through waking and dreaming.

And, whatever you do, don't ignore the lovely quotes that head the chapters!

Two personal favorites:

"Youth, which is forgiven everything, forgives itself nothing."—George Bernard Shaw

"If the doors of perception were cleared everything would appear as it is, infinite."—William Blake

As with Graham Joyce, I have previously expressed a very high opinion of the anthologist Jack Adrian and am delighted to announce that his latest gathering of disturbing fantasies, ***The Ash Tree Press Annual Macabre 2000*** (Ash-Tree Press, Ashcroft, BC; hardcover; 148 pp.; $38.50) completely confirms anything nice about him I may have said.

Somehow (I expect a lot of hard work had something to do with it!) he has managed to assemble a bookful of tales by first-rate writers that never saw publication between hard covers before and the most amazing thing about it is that—unlike collections of this sort cobbled together by less skilled literary archaeologists—none of the stories are bottom-of-the-barrel efforts best left in old magazines except by the compulsively curious; every one of them is a first-rate example of the author's work!

The stories in this collection were written in a period ranging from 1890 to 1920, an era of wildly extreme transitions on all levels which just may have been even more appal-lingly puzzling to its inhabitants than the one in which we presently find ourselves.

Indeed, thanks to them, we have the reassurance of being able to look back to that earlier turbulent era and see that one can live through a time when almost all of the essential basics of science and art and society are proven flimsy to the point of being vaporous and be comforted by the knowledge that the experience is perfectly survivable, even if it is extremely wearing.

In any case, the period was a marvelous one for Fantasy in a wide variety of ways. The freewheeling possibilities suggested by science's new revelations inspired some authors to dive into future imaginings far more daring than any before; the collapse of vast establishments gave others grand paranoid visions that remain marvelously enter-

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taining to this day and, going in the other direction, the daunting uncertainty of the times profitably drove a number of writers to now and then wander more deeply than they might otherwise have done into the simpler horrors of the past.

The first of the stories presented, "An Anniversary at the Hare and Billet" by the remarkable E. Nesbit and Oswald Barron, is a marvelous example of this last category, being as solid an example of a traditional Christmas ghost story as one could wish for. The dark action unfolds in a wayward inn a long time ago, takes place on Christmas Eve itself, concerns the marvelously evil doings of a highwayman and his henchmen, and will definitely gave you a most satisfactory case of the creeps.

One of my favorites is "The Empty Berth" by Rose Macaulay, an author nowadays best known for her novel *The Towers of Trebizond.* This may be one of the cleverest and most insidious uses of an occult tale to make a series of sociological points that I've ever read. It's also wonderfully sneaky as it leads you this way and that by the nose any number of times (or at least it did me) without your realizing it's happening. A beauty.

"What Measure Ye Mete..." by Ethel Lina White is a fine exploration of our darker possibilities and the dangers of making bad use of them. It also has a wonderfully self-serving villain and arranges a horrific and highly satisfying comeuppance for her. The last line is flawless and will give you a marvelous jolt.

"The Island of Ghosts" by Julian Hawthorne, son of Nathaniel, is the longest tale and ends the collection of nine stories with an extraordinary romance involving such a remarkable evocation of visual elements that I really felt, after I had finished reading it, that I'd just seen a very impressive movie. It was interesting to discover afterward in Adrian's "Notes and Sources" section which wraps up the book that Hawthorne had written some scripts during Hollywood's very early days, including one for his father's *The Scarlet Letter.*

Among others who are featured in the collection, good old Sax Rohmer is present with a jolly little story about a cat that pops most unexpectedly out of an ancient Egyptian mummy case and then proceeds to cause all kinds of trouble in the high society of 1914. We also have S. Baring-Gould of *The Werewolf Book* fame crafting a really grim, Algernon Blackwood sort of tale about what very deservedly happened to an evil Witch-Finder.

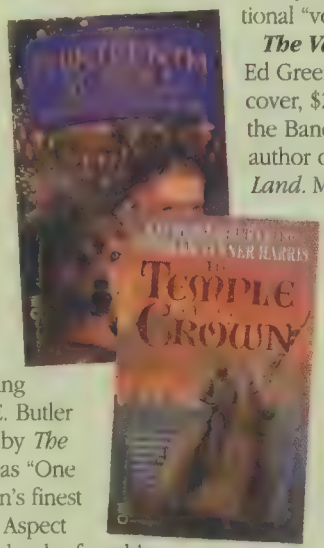
There are a number of authors I confess to having met for the very first time, two of them being Reginald Bacchus and Ranger Gull (actually it could have been difficult to meet

Bacchus in any case since Adrian admits that, in spite of considerable digging, he is not sure the man ever actually existed) who together wrote a shocker called "The Children of Pain" which is a genuinely grisly, even a tad yucky story about the multitudinous cruelties inflicted by Maxwell Zachary upon the ani-

BOOKS TO WATCH FOR

The Temple and the Crown, by Katherine Kurtz and Deborah Turner Harris, Warner Aspect paperback, $6.99. A historical Fantasy that continues the saga of Scotland's struggle for independence. It is 1306 and Robert Bruce must wrest control of Scotland from English rule. The Knights Templar, King Edward I, France's King Philip, and a Luciferian cult of alchemists factor into this tale of freedom and magic. At stake is the Templar "Stone of Destiny," false accusations, dark magic, holy relics, and freedom thwarted. A compelling tale that follows *The Temple and the Stone.*

The Thirteenth Scroll, by Rebecca Neason, Warner Aspect paperback, $ 6.99. "193rd year in the reign of the Line of Baoghil. Ruling House of the Eighth Province Kingdom of Aghamore. ..." Thus begins this enchanting tale of magic and prophecy. Much in the tradition of Katherine Kurtz, *The Thirteenth Scroll* will delight readers of high adventure and Fantasy. A child's future, nine barons all vying for control of one kingdom, a distant "Great Forest," a healer named Lysandra, and a dangerous woman called Aurya all entice the reader's imagination and will thrust you into a journey of dark dreams and heroic adventures. Who shall be the next high king? Shall the child named the "Font of Wisdom" be saved or destroyed?



Wild Seed, by Octavia E. Butler, Warner Aspect paperback, $13.95. Hugo and Nebula Award-winning author Octavia E. Butler has been hailed by *The New York Times* as "One of Science Fiction's finest writers." Warner Aspect has reissued this book of mythic exploration and anthropology. A story of gender that transcends genre ... Anyanwu is all that is female. Doro is all that is male. ... A gripping tale of the mating battle and passion and hatred of these two amazing characters. Anyanwu can "birth tribes ..." Doro can "raise armies and bend empires to his will. ..." Gripping adventure that encompasses journeys from Africa to colonies of America. A tale both modern and current, yet ancient and magical. A story told by a master storyteller with exceptional "voice" and vision.

The Vacant Throne, by Ed Greenwood, Tor hardcover, $25.95. "A Tale of the Band of Four," by the author of *The Kingless Land.* Meet Hawkril, bold warrior gifted with strength and fortitude; Craer, the clever thief; Sarasper, the wise healer; and Lady Embra Silvertree, mystical sorceress. Restoring the king to a lawless land in a constant state of war requires the use of the "Dwaerindim Stones." Yet the kingdom of Aglirta needs the "Band of Four" as well if it is to escape the evil shadow of dark and inhuman forces. A rollicking high Fantasy tale with wondrous heroes and evil baronies ... readers will be rooting for the "four" and quite sorry to see the story end. Perhaps these questing heroes will return for further adventure in other lands.

Crown of Silence, by Storm Constantine, Tor hardcover, $27.95. Author of the cult best-seller *Wraeththu Trilogy,* Storm Constantine is a wildly imaginative writer who has published her stories in *Realms of Fantasy.* The author resides in England, and her Web site is http://members.aol.com/Malaktawus/Storm.htm. This tale is the second volume in "The Chronicles of Magravandias." Orphan Shan is rescued by the magus called Taropat. Bred by the magi of the forest to be a hero, Shan is soon thrust into a world of uneasy destiny, alliance with enemies, and a quest for the missing Crown of Silence. The power of the crown has been forged by the dragons of old. A story called both lush and poetic, Constantine's tale will satisfy even the most jaded reader of Fantasy. Who is the true heir to this icon of power? Will Shan survive his journey to find the fabled Seven Lakes? Can the flames of the "Empire of Fire" ever be quenched? ❧

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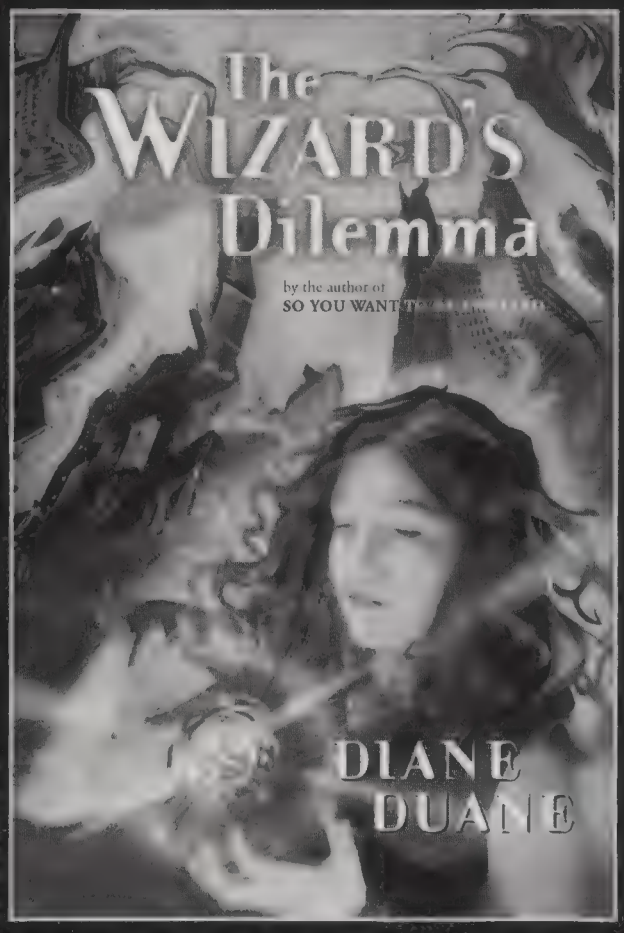

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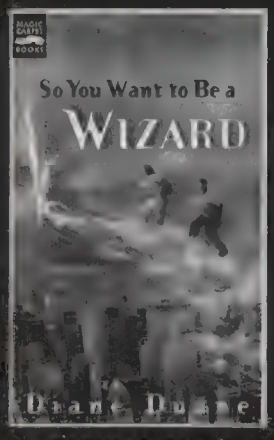

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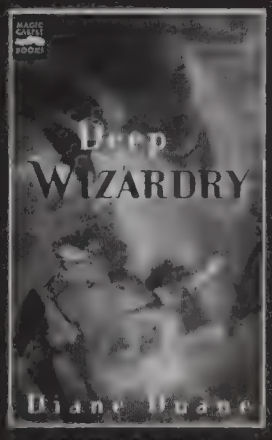

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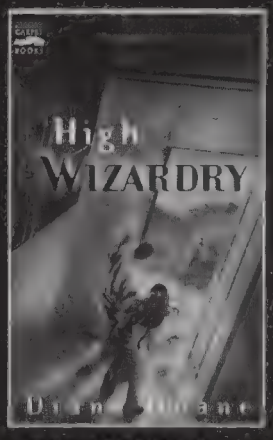

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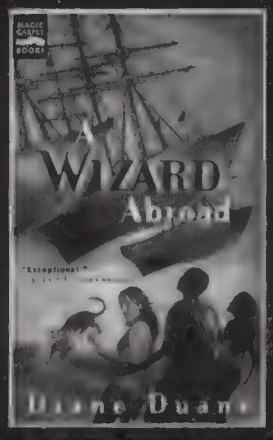

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mals and humans unfortunate enough to be attractions in his father's traveling circus. The story kept ringing louder and louder bells as I read it and by the time I reached its end I was convinced that somehow, one way or another, the thing very likely may have been the core inspiration for Todd Browning's totally unique movie *Freaks*. Adrian mentions that it appeared originally in 1899 in a magazine called *The Ludgate*. I looked up the film, which was released in 1932, and there's a long list of writers but no "based on" credit. It decidedly is the haunting sort of story that could have survived its original form by becoming transformed into an urban legend of its time and as urban legends can hang on for 30 years or so without any heavy breathing, so maybe that's just what happened.

By the way, the above-mentioned "Notes and Sources" section of the book is as witty as one would expect from this anthologist and contains an amazing amount of obscure and fascinating facts concerning the authors and their stories. I'm happy to admit I learned all sorts of things I'd never known before. Altogether an aficionado's delight.

Gahan Wilson

The Treasury of the Fantastic (David Sandner and Jacob Weisman, eds.; Frog, Ltd./ Tachyon Press, CA; hardcover; 747 pp.; $27.50)

I just spent four evenings in the alluring, alarming, and rarely commingled company of witches and ghosts, swordsmen and devils, dragons and godlings, and a host of other less easily categorizable creatures, and I could have easily spent another four, except that I was having so much fun that I raced through *The Treasury of the Fantastic* in half the time I intended to spend with it. And I bet you will too.

This mammoth collection of nearly 50 stories and poems—subtitled "Romanticism to Early Twentieth Century Literature"—functions as a survey of Fantasy between the years 1816 and 1923 (this latter date chosen to mark the birth of *Weird Tales* and the beginning of modern Fantasy). The Table of Contents reads like both a Who's Who of Literature—Keats, Poe, Tennyson, Yeats, Kipling, Wells, Wharton—and a gathering of more commercial wordsmiths—Frank Stockton, Robert W. Chambers, Edith Nesbit, Algernon Blackwood. Yet the editors have deftly managed to avoid both pretension and meretriciousness. Every story here, whether from an *artiste* like Henry James or a hard-working journalist like Ambrose Bierce, is an authentic and affecting foray into the wilds of the imagination, proving that even before Fantasy hardened into a genre it exerted its siren call on sensitive creators of all stripes.

It's hard to pick standouts in such a stellar crowd. I've always loved the work of E. Nesbit, and her "The Book of Beasts" is up to her usual high standards of whimsy and wit. Richard Middleton's "The Ghost Ship"—about a spectral pirate stranded in a turnip field—is very droll. And Twain's "The Mysterious Stranger" retains all its cynical shock value nearly a century after publication. Surely the strangest story here, one I've never encountered before, is "The New Mother," from 1882 and by Lucy Lane Clifford, where two poor children, seduced by a strange gypsy, come to a grim end. If you don't shudder at the closing sentence—"[T]hey know it is the sound of her wooden tail as she drags it along the floor."—then you already have ice water in your veins.

Finally, an additional benefit of having these stories assembled in a single place is the ability to chart the development and recurrence of certain tropes. Just one example: The voyage along the rainbow found in George MacDonald's "The Golden Key" (1867) echoes in E.M. Forster's "The Celestial Omnibus" some 40 years later.

This collection is both an education and a pleasure, a resource for anyone interested in the strong, dark roots of Fantasy.

Contact Frog, Ltd/Tachyon Press at P.O. Box 12327, Berkeley, CA 94712, or at www.northatlanticbooks.com.

Talking in the Dark, by Dennis Etchison; Stealth Press, PA; hardcover; 368 pp.; $29.95

How does one recognize an Etchison story? The tone is cool and slick rather than fevered and wild-eyed. No matter what dire events are about to derail the lives of Etchison's characters, the crafty narrator is always firmly in

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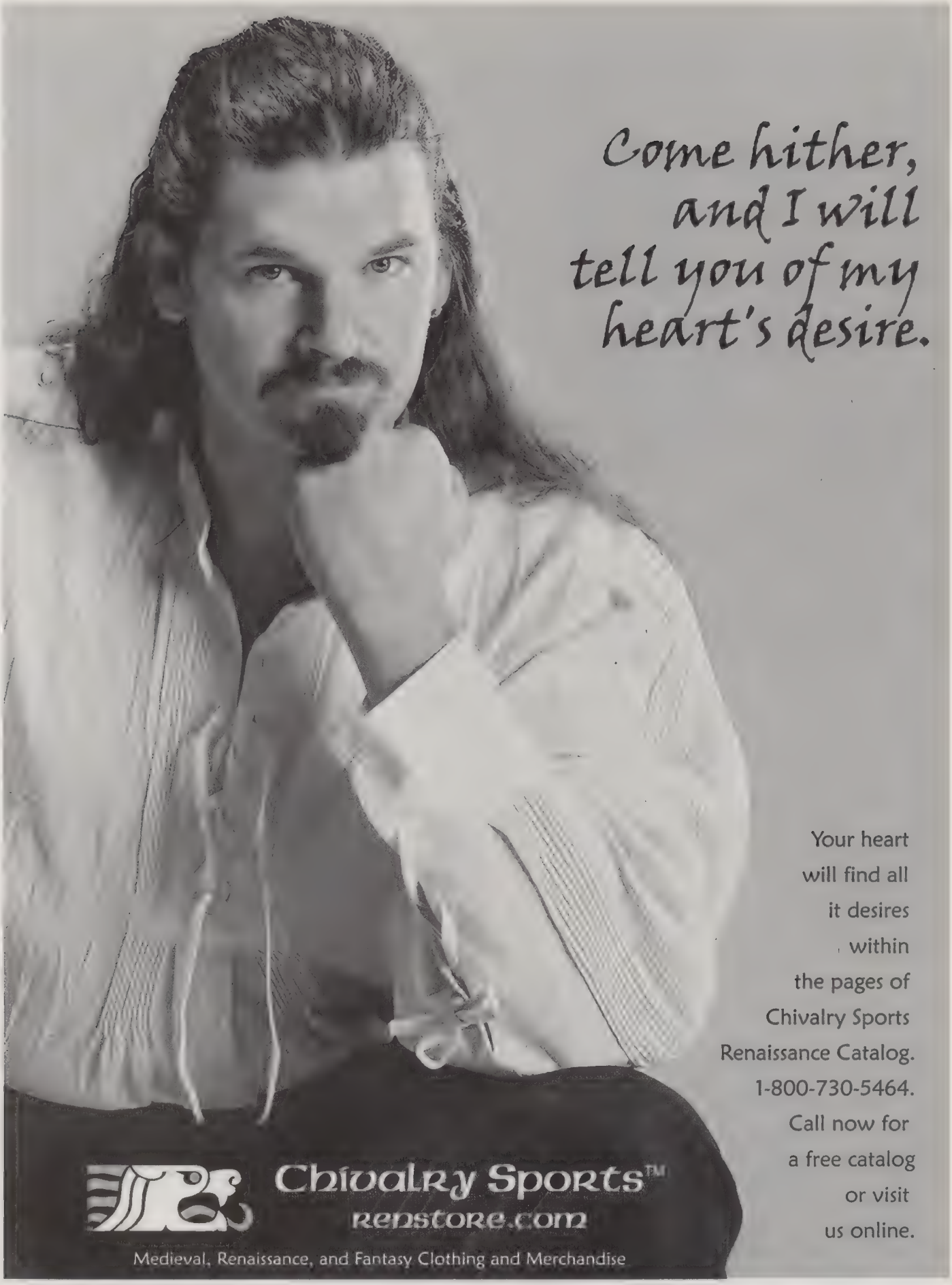
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charge, guiding the delicate effects and shocking climaxes with precision. Etchison also likes to focus on the unexceptional souls who compose the great majority of humanity. No celebrities, geniuses, heroes, arcane mages, or devilish serial killers are to be found in his stories, just average husbands and wives, children and youth, admittedly all in the grip of forces beyond their understanding or control. Etchison favors subtle horrors over gross-outs, aiming to produce shivers and gasps rather than the averted gaze of the offended. Finally, an Etchison story almost always takes place in contemporary America, shining a vivid spotlight on the quotidian 20th-century artifacts and rituals which familiarity have rendered almost invisible.

With 40 years of experience behind him, Etchison has honed his core concerns and methods to a sharp edge, and this collection of 24 pieces (including a previously unpublished one, "Red Dog Down"), constituting an informal "Best of," contains nary a poor story. True, the earliest, from 1972, are a shade less proficient. But even these are uncommonly capable of evoking shudders. By the time Etchison hits his stride, around 1991's "Call Home," he's unbeatable. This tale of a lost child who proves to be something horribly other than what she seems could have graced Bradbury's *The October Country* (1955).

Dennis Etchison confronts both the mortal challenges of the supernatural, and the supernal challenges in our mortal existence, all without cringing or conceding defeat. These are stories that will leave you stronger than you were before you encountered them.

You can reach Stealth Press at 336 College Avenue, Lancaster, PA 17603, or at www.stealthpress.com.

The Dragon and the Fair Maid of Kent, by Gordon Dickson; Tor Books, NY; hardcover; 400 pp.; $26.95

As I did some issues ago in the case of Christopher Stasheff, I'm delving again into a long-running series without any knowledge of past episodes. But this time around the experiment is a sad one, since the author, Gordon Dickson, passed away earlier this year, bringing an end to this particular Fantasy world, along with the many science-fictional universes for which he was more famous.

Dickson's saga, so John Clute's invaluable *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* tells me, began with a short story, "The Dragon and the George," published in 1957 and later expanded into the first novel of the series in 1976. Through occult experiments, James Eckert and his girlfriend Angie find themselves transported to a medieval world where events and personages roughly parallel Earth's history, save for the existence of magic. Able here to switch back and forth from human to dragon form, Jim quickly fashions a niche for himself and Angie, and they go native, never to return to our century.

In the newest book, Jim and Angie are par-

ents, Lord and Lady of Malencontri Castle, their adventuring days seemingly behind them. But the arrival of the young and impetuous Prince of Wales, Edward, along with his cousin Joan, the Fair Maid of Kent, soon involve the ex-20th-century denizens in intrigue and battle. A plot is afoot to kill Edward's father, King Edward III, by infecting him with the bubonic plague just now entering England from the Continent. Additionally, an army of goblins has been raised by an old foe, a rogue wizard named Agatha Falon. Only human martial prow-ess, magic from both Jim and his mentor Carolinus, and the aid of both dragons and the good hobgoblins will thwart the dastardly plot.

Dickson conveys his back story quite deftly, and the reader soon has his bearings. The characters are all fairly well rounded and enjoyable, though perhaps the females a smidgen less so. (The titular Fair Maid of Kent really has little to contribute to the plot, and Angie's fussy imperiousness begins to grate a bit.) But the events of the story, bulked out with medieval lore, are protracted far beyond any acceptable economy. There is much needless hustling back and forth between castles, too many councils of war that lay out in speeches everything we will later watch. This is a book that could have been cut nearly in half with no harm, and some good. Additionally, the attempts at humor—magic usage is regulated by an accounting office; the hobgoblins are naively silly—fall fairly flat, perhaps unsustainable amidst a background of Black Plague.

All in all, this accidental culmination of Dickson's series merely stages one more mild adventure in what must have once been a fresh venue, failing to bring the series to a satisfying climax.

Warrior Fantastic, Martin Greenberg and John Helfers, eds.; DAW Books, NY; mass-market paperback; 310 pp.; $6.99

Assembling a rewarding theme anthology requires a lot of skill on the part of its editors. Getting the mix just right is a delicate balancing act. An excess of stories along identical lines can skew the reading experience toward monotony. But stories scattered all over the map will make for a helter-skelter book. On the other hand, if all this behind-the-scenes juggling is carried off without a hitch, the reader will find each story contributing its proper weight to the big mosaic.

Greenberg and Helfers pull off this delicate trick here. Variety and consanguinity are in harmony. These stories, all revolving around the broad concept of which characteristics make a warrior, range from contemporary times to historical eras to Fantasy locales. Some pieces are deadly serious, others gleefully humorous. The archetypical image of the big-thewed barbarian warrior like Conan appears, but so do more unconventional vessels of courage. Plenty of supernatural action can be found in these pages, but so can some purely mimetic moments. The overall effect is that of a clearly defined territory significantly explored.

Out of 15 stories, none inconsiderable, here were my favorites.

Diana Paxson's somber "A Two-Edged Blade" portrays treachery and blood feuds among medieval Scandinavians with the verve of Poul Anderson's classic, *Hrolf Kraki's Saga* (1973). "Heritage," by Fiona Patton, boldly sides with the werewolves in a quasi-Russian setting. The career perks and drawbacks of a professional barbarian transferred willy-nilly all around the multiverse are humorously laid out in Tim Waggoner's "As Good as a Rest." Pauline Dungate slyly undercuts our expectations by the end of her "Demon Hunter," whose Hindu atmosphere is richly evoked. If I read Nini Kiriki Hoffman's enigmatic "Suspended Animation" correctly, then she has managed to endow a Pokemon-like game with a level of emotional resonance you would never suspect the game could sustain. In Jody Lynn Nye's "Conscript," a simple artisan drafted into a war finds himself suffering a fate that transcends death—for good and bad. A beautiful fable of redemption and charity is delivered by Gary Braunbeck in "Bright Be the Face," wherein a malformed villager earns respect by his unique heroic act. And lastly, in "Making a Noise in This World," Charles de Lint focuses on one crucial incident in the life of Amerindian graffiti artist James Raven, as the young man must choose between two forms of revenge, one violent and one clever.

Certainly, there's something for every taste in this thoughtfully compiled examination of the warrior spirit. ❧

Paul Di Filippo

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When the yellow brick road vanishes—
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GIANTS AND OGRES AND TROLLS

"Oh, my!" said Dorothy.

She was lost again. The path that led into this forest had disappeared so that no matter which way she turned, all she could see was trees, tall firs and spruces in every direction. It was so dark she couldn't see the shadows to tell which was east or west and so cold she was shivering in her thin, blue gingham dress. She had almost been to the point of tears when she heard a sound—a voice.

"Where are you?" she shouted, and heard the cry again.

Using her hands to push her way through the low-hanging branches of the trees, she followed the sound until it led to a small clearing where a little man with red hair was seated on a fallen log. He had his face buried in his hands and he was moaning aloud in obvious misery.

For a moment Dorothy, lost and cold and frightened in this strange forest, forgot her own troubles. "What's the matter? Can I help you?"

The little man on the log sharply raised his head.

BY LOIS TILTON • ILLUSTRATION BY GARY LIPPINCOTT

people drop off their when they are too much

"Oh, my!" said Dorothy, dreadfully shocked. His mouth was sewn shut! As if someone had taken an awl and a leather bootlace and stitched his lips together! "Oh, that's terrible! Who did it to you? I'll bet it hurts!"

He glared at her with an expression like a sneer, except that it was hard to tell with his lips sewn shut the way they were.

"Oh, I'm sorry, that was stupid of me. Of course it hurts," Dorothy apologized. "Can I help?" She was a kind-hearted girl who hated to see anyone suffering. She reached into her pocket for the small pair of sewing scissors she always kept there, along with a threaded needle stuck into a piece of flannel, that Aunty Em had given her.

Seeing the scissors, he gave his head a short nod, still glaring at her suspiciously.

Dorothy approached him more closely. "I'll be careful, I promise. Oh, my, that does look nasty. Now, you hold still and I'll be as careful as ever I can." She bravely snipped and cut and pulled the leather cord free, despite his scowls. It was all bloody and scabbed and wanted to stick, and he winced every time she pulled on it. She was afraid she was indeed hurting him, but there was no helping it, which was what Aunty Em always used to say whenever Dorothy fell and got a skinned knee.

When she was finished he licked his lips—very carefully—and said, "That certainly took you long enough."

"You're welcome," said Dorothy, who had been brought up with good manners, unlike some people. "But how did that happen to you?"

"Some friends of mine didn't appreciate my jokes. So they thought this might be a good joke on me."

"Well, then I should think you must have some very wicked friends. Or else they must have been very bad jokes."

He looked very sour at that. "Or maybe both. But you've helped me, so now I suppose I have to help you. You do need help, don't you?"

Dorothy thought it was rather grudgingly offered. "Well, yes, I do. But how did you know?"

"Little girls don't generally go wandering in this forest alone. Unless they're lost, or someone has abandoned them. It happens a lot, you know—people drop off their children in the forest when they're too much trouble to keep at home."

"Well, no one dropped me here, but I am lost, and I do want to go home! Only I don't know your name."

"Well …" He seemed oddly reluctant to give it. "You can call me Sly, how about that?"

Uncle Henry had once hired a farmhand named Sylvester, who called himself Sly, so Dorothy didn't think there was anything *too* odd about the name.

"Where were you trying to go before you got lost?" Sly asked.

Dorothy sighed. "I have to find the Wicked Giant of the North."

"The Wicked Giant of the North?" he laughed, not in a very nice way. "Stupid little girl, do you know how many giants there are in the north? How many *Wicked* giants?"

Dorothy didn't much like being called stupid. If she had any other choice in the matter, she would have told Sly she didn't need his help. But she didn't seem to have any other choice. Certainly no one else had offered to help her. "I suppose there are a lot of giants?"

"Giants and ogres and trolls. This is where they all live. There's a giant on every mountain, an ogre in every cave, and a troll under every bridge. Why else do you think you haven't seen anyone else in this forest? The giants have eaten them all."

"Eaten them all? Even the children?"

"Especially the children. Children are the best eating, they have the most tender meat. I could show you a bridge nearby with a pile of bones under it as tall as your head, and most of them are children's bones."

"No, thank you," said Dorothy with a shudder. "But I *have* to find the Wicked Giant of the North! This is terrible!"

"And just why is that?"

Dorothy exhaled a great sigh of exasperation. "So I can get home, of course! The Wizard is holding my ruby slippers and he won't give them back unless I bring him the gold ring of the Wicked Giant of the North."

"I see." Sly bit his lower lip absent-mindedly, then winced. "Well, now, I might just be able to help you. But let me tell you first, in my experience people who send other people off on these quests are usually trying to get rid of them. They don't really expect you to come back alive, let alone with the goods. And then these things are always more complicated than they seem at first. To get the golden ring, you have to kill the dragon, to kill the dragon, you have to give it the golden apples, to get the apples—well, you get the idea."

"I'm sure you're quite right. But I don't know what else to do. If I don't get this ring, I can never go home! I was *hoping* that maybe Glinda would help me. I was looking for Glinda when I wandered into this forest and couldn't find the way out."

"Glinda?"

"The Good Witch of the North."

"Oh, so that's what she's calling herself these days! It's been a while. But you don't need her now. You helped me, so now I have to help you. I *think* I know the giant you mean. If this gold ring is the ring I think it might be."

"You can take me there? You can help me get the ring?"

He gave her a sly and shifty grin. "You can sew my mouth back shut if I don't!"

"Oh, I would never do that!" said Dorothy, quite shocked.

But he stood up from the log (and suddenly Dorothy thought he didn't seem quite so little anymore) and gave a shrill whistle. A moment later a pair of goats harnessed to a cart came charging into the clearing. "Here we are!" Sly said cheerfully. "Transportation!"

Dorothy thought it was a very odd kind of transportation. She didn't really like goats very much. Once, a goat on Uncle Henry's farm had butted her from behind and made her skin her knee and tear out the hem in her dress. And these particular goats had a look about them that she didn't trust—their hot, red eyes, the flames that seemed to shoot from their nostrils when they snorted, and the sharpness of their teeth. For that matter, she didn't quite trust Sly. But she got reluctantly into the cart, because she didn't really have another choice.

Dorothy had never known that goats could run so fast—so fast that their hoofs struck sparks from the rocky ground. The cold wind was blowing through her hair and she had to wrap her arms around herself to stop from shivering. In no time at all they were out of the forest and racing along the top of a steep, rocky cliff overlooking the sea.

"Where are we going?" she shouted to Sly over the wind. "Is this where the Wicked Giant lives?"

"Well, not exactly. There's something else we need to get, first. Remember, I warned you, that's the way it usually is with these stupid quests."

"I know," she sighed, mostly to herself because of the rush of the wind.

They rode all through the day, and it was almost sunset when Sly stopped the cart and looked around. They had come to a spot where the cliff face was pockmarked with caves, and in front of the caves the ground was all littered with bones. "This looks like a good place."

"Here?" Dorothy asked in horror, seeing the bones. "A good place for what?"

"To stop and rest for the night, of course. You look hungry and cold."

"Well, I am cold. And hungry, a little."

"I can fix that." Sly snapped his fingers, and in an instant a heap of driftwood on the beach burst into a roaring fire. But when Dorothy came closer to it to warm herself, she saw that the driftwood was really pale, white bones.

"Oh, my! How did you do that?" she exclaimed mistrustfully. "I think you must be a wizard, too."

"Not really. It's just a knack I have."

"But are you a Good wizard, or a Wicked one?"

"Does it matter?"

"Of course it matters!"

"Then maybe I'd better not say."

Dorothy didn't quite like this answer. "I'm not sure if I should be here with you if you're a Wicked wizard."

He grinned unpleasantly again. "If you were here without me, you'd probably find yourself eaten by that ogre."

"Ogre?" Dorothy looked in the direction he was pointing and saw a large, misshapen figure shambling up from the caves below them. She stifled a scream. "He's coming right here! Is he going to eat me?"

Sly was unharnessing the goats. "I suppose that's what he wants. It usually is. He ate all the others, down to their bones."

The ogre approached their fire, snuffling the air. "I think … I smell … *child meat!*"

"Oh!" cried Dorothy in such terror she couldn't even move. "Oh!"

"Welcome," Sly called out cheerfully to the ogre. "You're just in time for dinner!"

"Child meat!" the ogre grunted again, slavering.

"No, I have something here even better than child meat. I have *goat meat.*"

"Goat meat?" The ogre looked around, still snuffling the air. "I *like* goat meat!"

"Of course you do. Goat meat is even better than child meat!" And as he spoke, Sly was deftly butchering both of his goats, cutting them into pieces ready for the spit.

"Goat meat!" said the ogre, drooling copiously down his chin.

"Oh, that's right, you like yours rare," said Sly, handing him a raw haunch. He spitted some more of the meat over the fire to roast. Dorothy had never eaten goat meat and never meant to, but soon the aroma from the spit was making her mouth water.

In the meantime, on the other side of the fire, the ogre was gorging himself on the raw flesh, tearing the pieces off the bone with his huge strong teeth. "You're a big eater," Sly remarked. "But then, so am I."

"Haw!" bellowed the ogre. "Haw! Haw! Nobody eats as much meat as me!"

"I'll bet I can eat *more* meat than you," Sly bragged. "But I need something to wash it down. Where can we find some beer in this wilderness?"

"Beer," grunted the ogre. "I bring beer. You wait here. Don't eat goat meat till I get back."

"Don't worry. I'll wait for the beer."

In a few moments the ogre returned, dragging a large iron cauldron behind him. "Here is beer. As much as you can drink. Now, what about bet?"

"All right, how's this—we each get one goat apiece. If you eat all of yours first, you can have this girl for dessert. Child meat, nice and tender. And if I win, I get your cauldron full of beer."

"Good bet," said the ogre, satisfied, and he started to gnaw on another raw leg of goat. Sly took a haunch for himself off the fire and matched him bite for bite. It was about the most revolting sight Dorothy had ever seen, the two of them stuffing the meat into their mouths, their hands all covered with blood and grease, letting it run down their chins, throwing the bones on the ground. Their manners were atrocious. Aunty Em would have made them both leave the table.

The ogre's hairy belly seemed to distend. It swelled larger and larger. It grew so big that Dorothy thought the ogre must have eaten an entire horse, not just a goat. But Sly had eaten just as much of the meat as the ogre, and still there was more, roasting on the spit over the fire. How many legs did two goats have, anyway? Dorothy wondered.

Finally the ogre's eyes were starting to glaze over. The rate of his chewing slowed, and he swallowed each new gobbet of meat only with visible difficulty. Sly, on the other hand, was still gnawing away with relish at a rack of ribs, and washing down each bite with a copious swallow from the ogre's cauldron of beer.

"Mmph," grunted the ogre, who was determined not to be outdone, and he reached painfully for yet another leg of goat. But no sooner had he swallowed the first bite than his belly burst wide open.

"Oh!" cried Dorothy, scrambling up to her feet to avoid the exploding contents of the ogre's overpacked paunch. "Oh, my! Oh, dear!"

Sly, grinning in repletion, patted his own stomach and emitted a resonant belch. "There's plenty of meat left, don't you want any?"

"No!" Dorothy cried quickly. "No, thank you!"

"Are you sure? Then how about some beer? Plenty left here, too. This is the Ever-Full Cauldron."

"Certainly not! I don't drink beer!"

Sly raised his eyebrows in astonishment. "You don't? What do you drink, then?"

"Why, water, of course. And milk."

"Well, if you wanted milk, you should have said so before I butchered the goats!"

"I'm sorry," said Dorothy. But then she was astonished when Sly got heavily to his feet, picked up the skins of the slaughtered goats and tossed them over the two heaps of bones left over from the feast. In a moment, the beasts were alive again, just as evil-eyed as before.

"Oh!" she cried. "Why, you *must* be a wizard!"

"The goats actually belong to a friend of mine," Sly explained modestly. "*He* is what you might call a wizard. I … borrowed them for this trip. But feel free to milk the she-goat whenever you'd like some milk to drink." Then he lay down on the ground near the fire, belched again, and was soon snoring loudly.

"Oh, dear," said Dorothy unhappily as the goats glared in her direction. She had no intention of trying to milk one—not *those* goats! She got a cup of water from the river, instead, and spent the remainder of the night cold, sleepless, and as far away from both the goats and the ogre's stinking, burst-open corpse as possible.

The next morning Sly woke cheerfully and went to the cauldron full of beer. He lifted it to his mouth and took a long, long swallow. Then he brought a small pouch out of his shirt. *"Cauldron into the pouch,"* he said, and immediately the pot (still brimming full of beer, Dorothy noticed) shrank to such a size that it easily fit inside the sack. "So much for that," he said with another satisfied belch.

"Why, what a very handy little pouch!" Dorothy exclaimed.

"Yes, I find it useful. An old woman gave it to me when I did her a favor, once. Or was it an old man?" he muttered as he began to harness the goats to the cart.

"Aren't you ready to go?" he asked Dorothy in a moment, and of course she had no other choice, so she got into the cart next to him, and in a instant they were racing away again, with the clatter of the goats' hoofs on the rocks like thunder and lightning. The cold wind of their passage blew Dorothy's hair and dress until she almost cried, thinking of her warm coat at home—home, safe at home with her Uncle Henry and Aunty Em! But she *couldn't* go home until she brought the Wizard the gold ring of the Wicked Giant of the North!

Sly never stopped the cart until the sun was growing low in the

"No ogres. You see, the trolls eat them all."

sky again and they came to a place where a bridge crossed the gorge of another river. At the foot of the bridge was a heap of gnawed bones, almost as high as Dorothy's head. "This looks like a good place," he announced.

"A good place for what?" Dorothy asked in horror, staring at the bones. "To find more ogres?"

"No ogres here. But you look hungry and cold." And once again he snapped his fingers to set the heap of bones bursting into a roaring fire. "Ah!" he said, rubbing his hands. "It gets chilly at night this far north, doesn't it?"

Dorothy was still worried after the night before. "Are you *sure* there are no ogres around here?"

"No ogres. You see, the trolls eat them all."

"Trolls!"

"Like that fellow there."

Dorothy looked where he was pointing and saw a huge, hideous, hairy troll climbing out from under the bridge. She almost screamed out loud. The troll was at least three times as large as the ogre had been, with his knuckles dragging on the ground and a great, thick shelf of bone that almost hid his eyes from sight. As he approached the fire, he sniffed the air and growled, "I think … I smell … *child meat!*"

"He's coming here! He wants to eat me!"

"Of course he does! He's a troll!" And Sly called out cheerfully, "Welcome! You're just in time for dinner!"

"You got child meat!" the troll slavered.

"I have something here even better than child meat. I have *goat meat!*"

"Goat meat!" Drool ran down the troll's chin into the matted fur of his chest. "I *like* goat meat! Yesterday, I ate *three* goats! Big one, middle-sized one, little one the best, nice and tender."

"Well, I just have two goats, but they're both big ones."

"Two goat, one child," the troll corrected him. "Big goat tough meat. Child meat tender like little goat."

"And plenty of beer to wash them all down with." At which, Sly pulled out the pouch from inside his shirt and said, *"Cauldron out of the pouch."* Instantly it was standing there on the ground, brimfull of foaming beer to the very top.

"I make you a bet," said Sly to the troll, "we'll start with the goats, one apiece, and whoever finishes his goat first gets to eat the child." As he spoke, Sly was again starting to butcher the animals. "Oh, did you want some milk first?" he asked Dorothy.

"No, thank you," she said quickly.

Once again, Sly spitted his meat over the fire to cook, but the troll simply ripped a leg off his. His manners were even worse than the ogre's. He stuffed huge hunks of flesh into his wide-open maw, while gore ran down his chin. Like Sly (whose manners weren't much better, Dorothy thought, seeing him gorge himself on greasy, singed meat), he washed down almost every bite with a vast swallow of beer.

Anxiously, Dorothy counted how many joints the troll ate. If each goat had four legs, and there were two goats, then that ought to make eight haunches of goat—no more. And when they were finished, the troll was going to want to eat *her*! But the troll devoured one haunch after the other after the other, and there he still sat with a leg of goat in each hand and one in his lap. And Sly, too, had eaten just as many, and there were still two more on the fire. "Oh, my!" she thought, never-ending goat meat, ever-full cauldrons! Sly *must* be some kind of wizard, no matter what he said! She only wished she knew which kind he was, Good or Wicked.

The two of them ate and drank, ate and drank, until their bellies were both starting to get distended. Then, when Dorothy was beginning to be sure they were both going to burst, the troll tipped the cauldron to take another drink—and it was empty! "No more beer," he rumbled unhappily.

"No more beer!" Sly exclaimed. "Why, then, the bet's off!"

"No," grunted the troll. "Goat meat still left. Bet still on. I bring ale. You like ale?"

"Ale is just fine."

"You wait here. Don't eat more goat meat till I get back."

"Don't worry. I'll wait for the ale," Sly said, looking rather glassy-eyed and relieved to have a respite from stuffing himself.

"Are you going to trick him into eating himself to death, too?" Dorothy asked in concern.

"The only thing more stupid or greedy than an ogre is a troll," Sly said confidently. He paused. "Except that a troll is so much bigger, it takes a lot more to fill him up."

"Oh, dear!" Dorothy exclaimed. "What if you burst before he does? What if you run out of goat meat?"

"That's what the *ale* is for!" Sly explained. "Don't worry. Everything is under control. Ah!" he added as the troll returned bearing a large, heavy vat.

"Ale," the troll grunted. "Never empty this vat."

"Good!" Sly exclaimed. "I was thirsty!" And to demonstrate, he tipped the vat and poured a huge swallow down his throat.

Not to be undone, the troll took an even larger gulp. Soon there was once again nothing to be heard but the sound of teeth gnawing on goat bones and the gurgling of ale running down throats, and frequent eruptions from both overloaded guts.

Larger and larger swelled the bellies. Slower and slower the chewing and swallowing. There was sweat breaking out on Sly's forehead, and he looked alarmingly as if he were going to be ill. And the troll was starting in on yet another haunch of raw goat meat. "Oh!" thought Dorothy, "Sly is going to lose the contest, and then the troll will eat me, and I'll *never* get home to Aunty Em!" The prospect was so dreadful she was almost about to burst into tears.

Then, just at that moment, the first rays of the sun broke over the bridge, and the troll made a terrible sound like a millstone grinding, and turned entirely into a concrete statue.

"That took long enough!" Sly belched loudly with a look of profound relief, throwing down a rib, half-eaten.

"Why, what happened?" Dorothy asked in astonishment.

"Don't you know? All trolls turn to stone if the sun hits them. I thought everyone knew that. Except that trolls are so stupid and greedy, it's easy to make them forget." Groaning, he picked up the goats' skins to throw over their bones and make them whole again, but he paused to ask Dorothy, "Are you sure you don't want any meat first?"

"No, thank you," she said, although she was really very hungry indeed after two days without food. But after seeing what had happened to the ogre, she couldn't bring herself to eat from the leavings of that terrible feast.

"It's your choice." Sly finished harnessing the goats to the cart, then took out his little pouch. *"Cauldron into the pouch,"* he said, and *"Vat into the pouch."* Instantly both cauldron and vat jumped inside the small leather sack.

Then he asked Dorothy, "Are you ready to go visit the Wicked Giant of the North?"

"What are you going to do when we get there?" Dorothy asked anxiously. "You're not going to challenge the giant to another eating contest, are you? Why, you would have lost to the troll if the sun hadn't come up just in time! And giants are even larger than trolls! Or, at least I've heard that they are."

"Oh, but now I have *both* the Ever-Full Cauldron and the Never-Empty Vat! I can't lose!" Sly exclaimed with a confident grin, pulling

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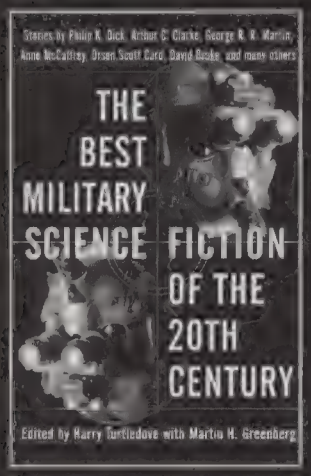
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"Child meat good, goat meat good!"

her into the cart. And with that, the goats sprang into a run, so fast that their hoofs split the rocks with a sound of thunder and the sparks flashed like lightning in a storm.

"Oh, dear! Oh, my!" Dorothy cried out loud, but the cold wind of their passage tore the words from her mouth. Oh, how she wished she had never heard of the Wicked Giant of the North, or his gold ring! Or met Sly in the forest and helped him and earned his help in return. Oh, how she wished she could just go home to her Aunty Em's warm kitchen! Oh, what she wouldn't give for a piece of pie and a glass of milk!

Sly didn't stop the cart until they came to a mountain surrounded by low foothills. But when they came even closer, Dorothy could see that the hills were actually heaps of bones—bones of children, bones of grown men, bones of ogres and trolls. "This looks like a good place to stop," Sly said cheerfully, and with a single snap of his fingers, he turned the hill of bones into a raging fire.

"Oh, no!" Dorothy cried. "I don't want to stay here! I want to go home!"

"But you can't go home! That's what you told me—you can't go home until you bring the Wizard the gold ring of the Wicked Giant of the North. And see, here he is now!"

"Oh, dear!" Dorothy sobbed. But it was too late to run away. One of the peaks of the mountain had moved, and she suddenly saw that it was the giant! He was nine times as large as the troll, his arms were like tree trunks, and the mountain shook as he strode down toward them. The huge, bony mass of his jaw held teeth the size of shovels, and the wind roared through his nostrils when he sniffed the air and bellowed, "I SMELL CHILD MEAT!"

Dorothy almost wet herself in fear. The gold ring on his smallest finger would have fit around her waist. Was *this* what the Wizard wanted? How was she ever supposed to take it away from him? How was she ever supposed to get it back to the Wizard? Even supposing the giant didn't eat her first.

"Look here, I have something even better than child meat," Sly was saying, "I have goat meat!"

"CHILD MEAT GOOD, GOAT MEAT GOOD." But instead of waiting for Sly to butcher the goats, the giant simply picked up one fierce-eyed beast in each hand. First one went into his mouth, then the other. *Crunch* went the bones, and they were both swallowed down, whole.

"Oh, dear!" cried Dorothy.

"Oh-oh," muttered Sly. But he quickly called up to the giant, "I'll bet you'd like some beer to wash down that goat meat!" And taking the pouch from his shirt, he uttered the words: *"Cauldron out of the pouch!"*

"BEER GOOD," boomed the giant. He picked up the Ever-Full Cauldron in one hand and started to quaff from it like a mug. *Gulp, gulp, gulp,* and then the Ever-Full Cauldron was empty!

"Oh, dear!" cried Dorothy.

"Oh, shit," said Sly. And immediately whispered, *"Vat out of the pouch!"*

The vat appeared as he called up to the giant, "Have a drink of ale!"

"ALE GOOD," the giant agreed again, lifting the Never-Empty Vat and draining it in another three swallows. "NOW I EAT LITTLE MAN. THEN CHILD."

"Oh, no!" cried Dorothy, looking to Sly. She just *knew* he was going to get them both in trouble! "What are you going to do now?"

But Sly seemed to have no idea, and the giant was reaching down for them with his vast hairy paws, and there was nowhere for Dorothy to run and nowhere to hide—except for Sly's magic pouch, lying on the ground. She thought for an instant that maybe she could wish herself inside the pouch to hide, but then, could she ever wish herself out again?

The giant's huge fingers had closed around Sly, and he yelled, "Quick! Do something!"

So Dorothy closed her eyes, and she screamed: *"Giant into the pouch!"*

When she opened her eyes again, the giant was nowhere to be seen. But on the ground, the pouch was thrashing around furiously. Sly picked up a huge branch and began to beat on the leather sack with heavy blows until it stopped moving. "That was quick thinking," he grinned at Dorothy.

But she wasn't appeased. "You could have done that yourself, all along!" she accused him. "And with the ogre and the troll, too!"

"Well, of course! Don't you think that's what I was planning?" he protested.

Dorothy didn't think so at all. "But then we didn't need to stop and get the ogre's cauldron! Or the troll's vat! That was just a waste of time!"

"Good eating and drinking is never a waste of time!" he insisted.

Dorothy still didn't believe him, but Sly wasn't paying attention to her now. He picked up the pouch, which was dripping blood. *"Everything out of the pouch!"* he ordered.

"Oh!" cried Dorothy. "Oh, my. Oh, that's disgusting!" She turned away from the sight of the battered and mangled giant, or all that remained of him, reminding herself that he had been, after all, a *Wicked* Giant, who ate little girls.

But there, on the dead giant's hand, was his gold ring. With difficulty, for it was as large as the span of Dorothy's arms and very heavy, Sly pulled it off the giant's finger. "Well," he said in a satisfied voice, "this *is* the ring I thought it was!"

"It's very big!" exclaimed Dorothy, echoing his tone. "And it looks very heavy!" Surely, after she gave *this* to the Wizard, he'd finally let her go home again. "I suppose I could carry it back in the pouch," she said.

"Yes," Sly agreed, "that's a very good idea. *Ring into the pouch!"*

The ring disappeared inside the leather sack, but then in the next instant, Sly also disappeared in a burst of flame and smoke and cruel laughter. When the smoke cleared, Dorothy saw a large falcon flying away, carrying the pouch in its beak.

"Wait!" she shouted, "Don't leave me here!" But it was no use. The falcon ignored her pleas, and soon it had disappeared from sight.

"Oh," she cried, "I should have known he was really a Wicked wizard! I wish I'd never helped him in the first place! Aunty Em was right, I should never talk to strangers!

"Now what am I going to do? How am I *ever* going to get home?

"I don't suppose you'd take me back to the Wizard?" she asked the goats, but they only glared at her with their hot, burning eyes, safe and whole again despite being eaten by the giant. "I suppose not. And even if I did get back, I still wouldn't have the gold ring, and the Wizard wouldn't send me home anyway. Oh, whatever am I going to do?" She sobbed and sobbed.

But crying was never any use, as Aunty Em always used to tell her, so she dried her tears and looked around her. She was hungry and thirsty, in the mountains surrounded by hungry, thirsty giants and ogres and trolls. And all she had were two goats that yielded meat that could never be finished, the ogre's Ever-Full Cauldron, and the troll's Never-Empty Vat.

There was only one thing to do.

Soon there was a new establishment in the mountains of the far north, with a sign that read:

DOROTHY'S BAR AND GRILL

And if she hasn't run out of goat meat or beer, why, she's there still. ❧

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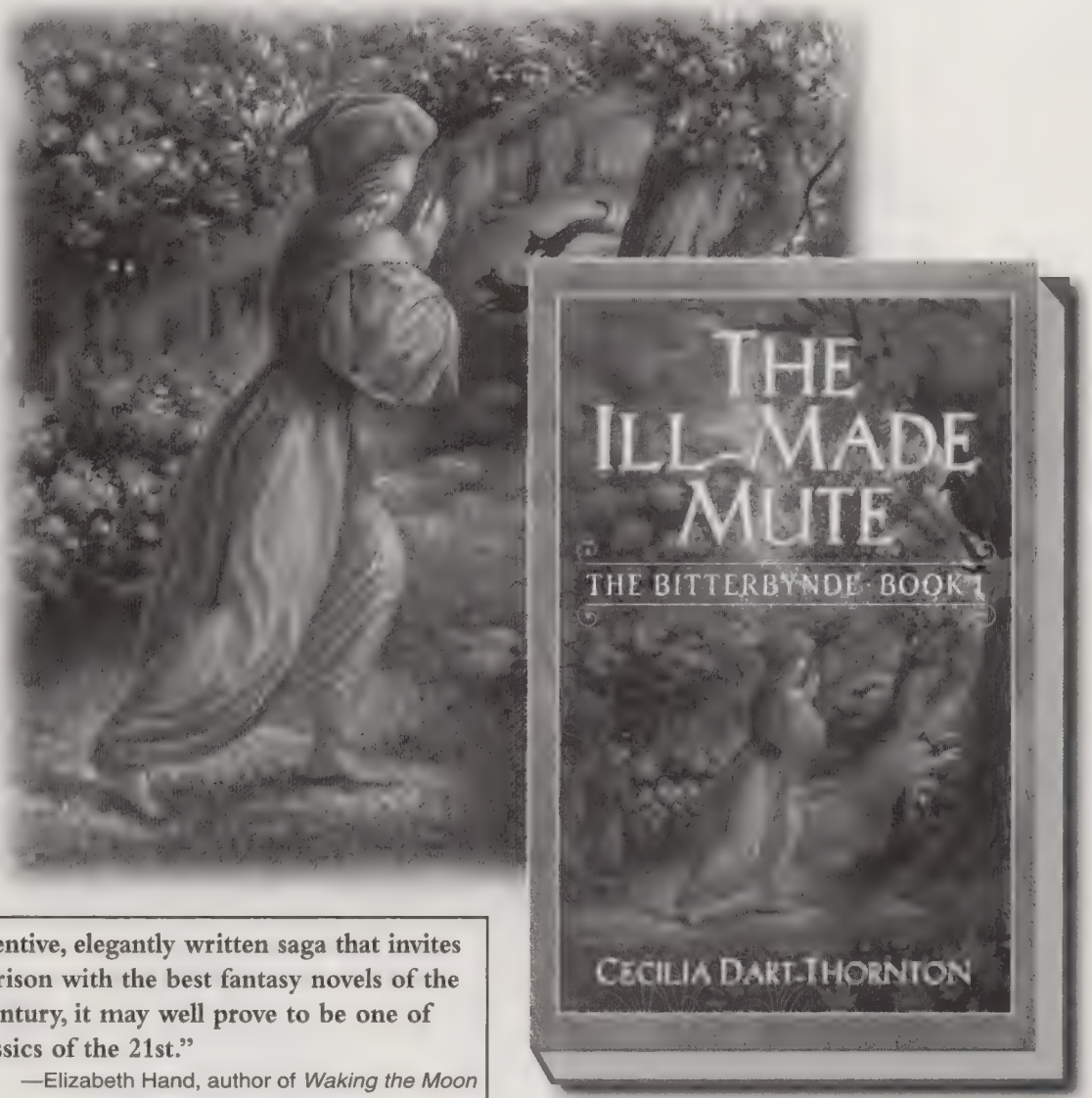

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BY HARLAN ELLISON

Who, did you never ask of yourself... who? What hand draws the maps to lost lands?

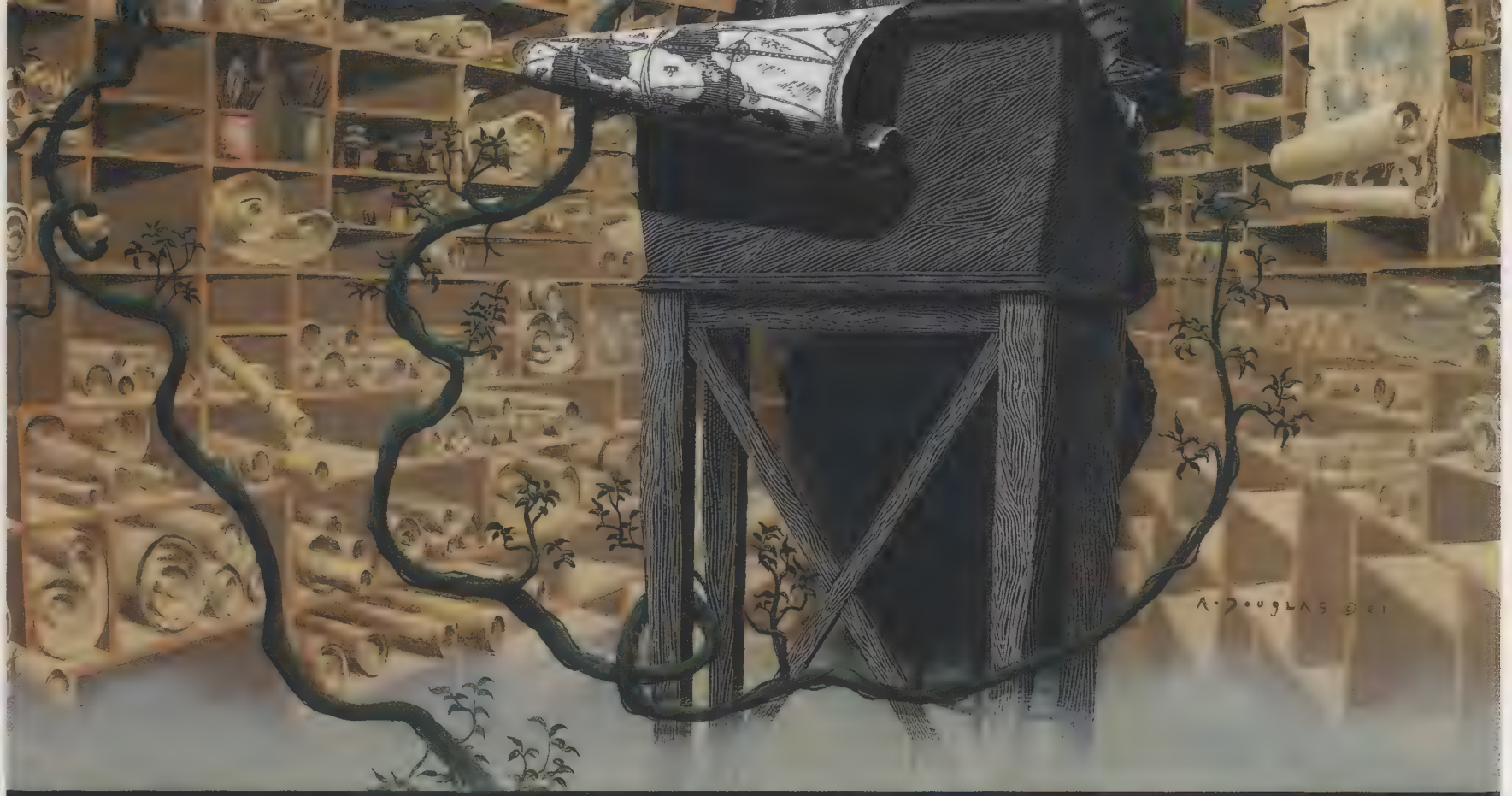

ILLUSTRATION BY PATRICK ARRASMITH AND ALLEN DOUGLAS

You've asked me to file the report, so that's what I'm doing. But this is also my resignation notice. It was a miserable, meanspirited job you stuck me with, and I hated even the *idea* of doing it. But I did it. I did as I was told, I suppose, because I've been with WorldSpan (formerly Blackstar Holdings [Pty.] [Ltd.]) since you recruited me out of the U. of Chicago twenty years ago, and like a good obedient dog I was part of that generation between the Baby Boomers and GenX that believed Daddy Corporation would take care of me all the way to senescence. And I *was* your good little running dog, did whatever you asked, didn't weigh the ethical freight, swallowed hard sometimes as I watched the knives go in, but I just intoned the mantra *I don't want to get involved, it ain't none of my business*. I ate those fat paychecks and never got bulimic.

But this time, oh boy *this* time it couldn't be swallowed. I particularly hated it, Howard, when you gave me the assignment and said it was apropos that *I* be the one to carry it out, seeing as how my name is Charles Trimbach. You laughed at that. You and Barry, both of you thought it was hilarious: "trim back" was a terrific play on words for such a puke job you wanted done. I couldn't swallow hard this time; it made my gorge buoyant. And the lesson I learned, if it's a lesson at all, is what prompts my resignation.

I quit, WorldSpan. Howard, Tom Jr., Kincaid, all the rest of you up on the 44th floor. I'm done. Take the fat paycheck and stuff it. Done, fellahs. But I'm dogtrot trained; a lot of years; so here's my last piece of work. The report. Pardon the casual tone. But you notice: I didn't once use the eff-word.

The flight was late coming into Chicago Midway; and by the time the cab dropped me off in Old Town on the corner of N. Wells and Wieland it was coming up on late afternoon, early evening. Even with all the gentrification, it was still a sweetly raffish part of town. Jammed crisscross at the proper hemlines of Lincoln Park and the Gold Coast, what was left of Old Town still sucked up all the light and breathed back disturbing shadows. In a few more years everything between N. La Salle and Larrabee would be so squeaky clean you'd have to clear it with the condo committee to import even a tiny sinful act. But on this bitter cold February afternoon, with the blade of wind slicing in off the Lake, turning my bones to tundra, it was the old vengeful Chicago I'd grown up in.

And I got lost.

I always got lost in Old Town. Somewhere near Elm and Hill I turned the wrong way, got twisted, and wandered for the better part of an hour. Then, some dim memory of my childhood kicked in, and as I passed a sweep of vacant shops with the blind eyes of upstairs apartments reflecting the last tremor of setting sunlight, I saw the mouth of the dark alleyway that was my landing site. How I'd recalled it, over decades, I don't know. But there it was; and I crossed the street and stepped into dim shadowed yesterday.

There was a paper flower shoppe, and a guitar repair joint, and an antiques/collectables store; and wedged in between the guitar emporium—with a really cherry 1947 Les Paul "Broadcaster" hanging in the fly-specked front window—and the scentless dried brayera trying to look brave like a Victorian ruined garden …

There was the map shop. As neat and clean and brightly painted as a little red wagon on Christmas morning. The shop of maps in which labored a man named Abner Wonacott. The old guy you had sent me to fire. Charlie Trimbach, come to "trim back" that old cartographer in a store that shouldn't have existed, but did. Maybe it always had.

In hundreds of adventure movies, there's always a map of some strange, lost land. In Muslim mythology it's Kaf, the mountain range that circles the earth. In *The Odyssey* it was Ogygia, the island where Calypso kept Odysseus a captive. If you went looking for King Kong it was "2 south, 90 east, latitudes way west of Sumatra, southwest to Skull Island." The Garden of Eden, Barsoom, Asgard and Midgard, Atlantis and Avalon, the Catacombs of Rome, Mount Olympus, Oz, Nepenthe, Lilliput, Islandia, Hi-Brasil, Lemuria.

Did you never wonder: where do these maps come from?

Who makes these maps?

By what arcane mappery do these cartographs come to be? What nameless Mercator or Henry the Navigator, what astonishing Ptolemy or Kropotkin, beat the paths to Narnia and lost Hyperborea and the Fountain of Youth?

Who, did you ever ask yourself, who? What mapmaker sat and actually drew the lines and shapes? To all those *terra incognita* venues.

One of those things no one really thinks about. You hear a story about some expedition going to Mt. Everest—"chomolungma" the Mother Goddess of the Earth—because they've got a highly reliable map of the terrain where the *yeti* mates; or Sotheby's has auctioned off for two million five a map—highly reliable—that locates El Dorado; or the Seven Cities of Cíbola; or the fabulous sunken islands of Gunnbjorn Ulfson between Iceland and Greenland; the *real* Yoknapatawpha County; the *real* Grover's Mill that changed its name and altered its city limits after that Sunday night radio broadcast on CBS in October of 1938; the *real* location of Noah's ark at 17,000 feet above the Aras River plain but *not* atop Mount Ararat; you hear these stories, and you may wonder for an instant …

Where did such a map come from?

The last survivor of a Norwegian barque. The rambling mad footsoldier who emerged from the jungle after six months' missing. The withered septuageneric Cree sitting by the side of the road selling potions and talismans. The gypsy fortune teller. The speaking-in-tongues child who has been blind since birth.

There's always a chain of provenance; and it's always bogus. Comes to as dead an end as terra incognita itself. Yet the maps do exist.

There's always a chain of provenance; and it's always bogus. Comes to as dead an end as *terra incognita* itself. Yet the maps do exist. They come into the hands of the L. Frank Baums and the Edgar Rice Burroughses and the Ponce de Leons, the Samuel Butlers and St. Thomas Aquinases. But, do you ever ask yourself, where did *they* … how did *they* … come by these amazing—highly reliable—charts? Who draws the map that shows the entrance to the mountain where the children of Hamelin disappeared? Who describes latitude and longitude of the tropical island beyond Anacapa where Amelia Earhart came down safely and hid from the Japanese fleet? How does the singular cartographer get a highly reliable tracing of the rocky battered shore of Lemuria and the Kingdom of Prester John and the Well of Souls?

Did you ever ask that kind of question?

I never did, Howard, till that shadowy alleyway in Old Town on a bitter chill late afternoon in February.

What interior landscape I could see through the elegant gray-glass of the central pane of the ornately carved teak front door of the map shop was inchoate, indeterminate, yes a *terra incognita*. Absolutely appropriate. The handsomely whittled wooden sign that hung by brass chains at 90° to the storefront read:

I turned the bright shining gold handle of the front door, the handle in the shape of a sextant, and let the warmth from within flow out around me in the dark alley.

Then I stepped inside the curious map shop.

Understand something: I had been born and raised in Chicago, I had been away a long time, I had been married and widowed, I had a grown son and daughter who no longer needed my daily attention and who lived half a continent away, I had been a loyal corporate tool for most of my adult life, and I was solidly grounded in the pragmatic world, what they call the Real World, the continuum as received safely and sanely by those who renew their driver's license regularly and who watch their saturated fat intake. I do not go off on flights of fancy.

Now let me describe Incognita, Inc. to you.

All I knew was that WorldSpan had acquired this enterprise, this supposedly "mom'n'pop" shop, line-item-buried on a Schedule of Assets & Liabilities, on the second-to-the-last page of a thick sheaf of wholly-owned subsidiaries of the mega-conglomerate WorldSpan

had murdered in the takeover. Then had begun the pogrom, the flensing, the "de-accessioning" of properties that did not breathlessly contribute to the bottom line. The memo you e-mailed me, if you recall, Howard, used the phrase *cease and terminate this operation.*

But there had been no phone number, no fax number, no e-mail address, nothing but the shop number in a tiny commercial alleyway I couldn't find on the most detailed city map of Chicago. And so you had me fly to Old Town.

To trim back one Abner Wonacott, who apparently had been the owner and sole employee of Incognita, Inc., at this odd location, for what seemed to be—in spotty records—sixty-five years. And now I stood inside the door, and now I looked upward, and now I looked around, and now I found myself unable to grasp what I was seeing, here, inside this tiny shop.

Outside. Very small.

Inside. Vast.

I don't mean to tell you it was large. Large is the rotunda of Grand Central Station. Large is the basilica of St. Peter's Cathedral. Large is Hanging Rock in New South Wales. This was vast. Narrow, but vast. It stretched out beyond the logical, codifiable, eyesight-correct limit that Euclidean space acknowledged. The horizon line was invisible. There was no back wall to the shop. It all just stretched on out of sight, vast and deep, and going on and on till it came to a blurred point somewhere a million or so miles back there at the rear of the shop. On either side of me the walls rose straight up without break, and both walls were nothing but deep cubbyholes, hundreds of them, thousands of them, uncountable perhaps *millions* of them. Up and up and up into some sort of inexplicable ceilingless ionosphere, where clouds and chirruping creatures moved lazily. And in every cubbyhole there was a rolled map, or a group of rolled maps. Hundreds of maps, thousands of maps, uncountable perhaps …

And clambering all over those two walls of cubbyholes were the tendrils of the most luxurious liana vines I've ever seen. Dark green and lustrous, the vines writhed upward and downward and from side to side, wrapping themselves about a map roll here, a pair of papyrus charts there, then extricating their tendril ends from the cubby and slithering swiftly across the face of the wall—sometimes hurling themselves full across the shop to the wall opposite—and then fled rearward, to extend their length to an unknown destination far away in the cloudy foggy misty backland of Incognita, Inc.

It was, truly, the jungle telegraph. Possibly a kind of fern FedEx. Delivery by botanical messenger.

And right in front of me, not ten steps inside the front door, was the (apparently) sole living employee of this soon-to-be-terminated establishment, Abner Wonacott. Prop.

He sat high up on a bookkeeper's stool, something hugely Dickensian in appearance, like one of those old woodcuts by "Phiz" or Cruikshank from DOMBEY AND SON or A CHRISTMAS CAROL. The desk at which he worked was a very tall slant-top, tulip stenciled with tapering legs framed with cross-stretchers. The grain identified it as a very old mahogany.

He wore a full day-coat with short tails, striped trousers wing-collar shirt with a plum-colored cravat, and a diamond stickpin glistening between the trisail lapels. He wore a pince-nez that perched securely at the bridge of his aquiline nose, his hair was thick and pure white, and it hung over his forehead with an abundant curl like a dollop of whipped cream.

His eyes were the most revelatory shade of almond I've ever seen, with very black pupils, like a pair of well-ensconced beetles frozen in hundred million year old Baltic amber. It was enigmatic, trying to ascertain his age. He might have been sixty, less likely a weathered fifty, perhaps much older.

He had the kindest face ever gifted by the cruel and mostly uncaring world. He wore it without affectation.

"Excuse me," I said. "Mr. Wonacott?"

"Be with you in a spot, young man. Having a nip of a mean time with one of these isogrivs." He was working on a line, on a map he was drawing, up there on his high stool. "Grivation has never been my strong suit." He scratched quickly with the nib of a crowquill pen. "Look around. Amuse yourself. Be with you in two shakes of a lamb's tail."

I turned to look at the wall on my right. I walked across the pleasantly springy, mist-shrouded floor to the cubbyholes and marveled at what they held. Not just maps to Happy Valley and Ruritania and Lyonesse and Shangri-La; to Zothique and Ur and Erewhon and Pellucidar; but the route Verne parodied to reach the center of the Earth; a sad-looking graph locating the mass grave of the original colonists of the Lost Roanoke Colony (with a triptych map to the gravesite of Virginia Dare, first queen of the Croatan Indians); a large scroll map of "The Dark Continent" with an identifying Gothic cross marking the locale of The Elephants' Graveyard. It was somewhere near Mali.

There was a recently configured map of the shoreline of Lake Michigan indicating where to dredge to find the Bowie knife O.J. Simpson had thrown away.

"Would you like to know what our most requested item is?" I turned at his voice. He was sitting now with hands folded decently on the slant-top of the desk. I walked back to him and looked up into the kindest face in the world.

"Yes."

"Well now, you would think, wouldn't you, that it would be something like Atlantis or Camelot or an underwater configuration for Spanish treasure galleons, yes?" I smiled agreement. But no, he indicated with a waggle of a finger, "Five to one, our best seller is a personal site location map to the original *and translated into spoken English* lyrics to the song 'Louie Louie.' Isn't that remarkable?"

I stared up into his amber eyes. "Remarkable," I said, in a soft voice. "Like this shop. It's, uh, it's improbable." I felt my cheeks burning with embarrassment: "improbable." What the hell kind of a stupid word was that to use?! "It's very big. Inside."

"Oh, this is cramped quarters, I fear." He waved a hand above his head, diminishing the ascendant abyss that rose high and away over us. "You should have seen the absolutely imperial spaces accorded me when I worked for Khufu. Pyramid, it was. Very nice. And there was a canyon in Mesopo—"

I cut him off. "I've come to close you down, sir."

I couldn't help myself. I had to stop him. I felt so awful, like some sleazy server of subpoenas pretending to be an interested bypasser. "I've come from corporate headquarters to … I have a very generous severance check here in my … how is it you've worked for this company for, what is it, *sixty-five* years, can that be accurate, we don't seem to have much paperwork on all this uh …"

I ground to a halt. I felt just awful.

"Look," I said, "you won't remember me, but I came here, I think, once before; a long time ago; thirty-something years ago. To get a map. I'd lost something …"

He smiled down at me. "A bronze medal you had won, third prize in a kite flying contest in grade school."

"Yes! Yes, that was it, exactly! You remember. I'd lost it. Your map …"

"To be sure. My map. It's an all-purpose item, we sell quite a lot of them. I call it the Map to Your Heart's Desire. Do you still have that medal?"

"Migod yes!" I pulled out my pocket watch, and showed him the bronze fob. "It's the only thing I've ever won in my life. Not so much as ten bucks on a lottery, but I have the bronze medal. You found it for me."

"And now you've come to put me out of business."

"Believe me, it's not my idea. They gave me this lousy job because I mentioned one day, just idly, mentioned I was from around here

... and they thought it would be ..."

He looked sad. "I've been expecting something like this. There was a letter from ... what's the name of the new company that bought up the old one ...?"

Nowhere among the million conundra that scintillated and sang within the vast, questioning mind of the very old man who now called himself Abner Wonacott, like a heavenly chorus of inebriated lightning bugs, was there even one that wondered by whom Abner had been employed, now going on sixty-six years. If it wasn't a Pharaoh, it was a Doge, if it wasn't a Khan it was a Demiurge. The shop, and Abner under other names, had gone on for centuries.

Abner was only human, after all, and he did require food and shelter.

Every Friday by five PM the cashier's check appeared in a late post, signed in pen in an unintelligible hand, for that week's labors. Abner was only human, after all, and he did require food and shelter. And so it had been for now going on sixty-six years at this current location. Periodically, every sixteen months by rough estimation, Abner's check was nine percent greater than those that had preceded it. On his birthday—June 11th usually—and at holidaytime—he had never known if the impetus was Chanukah, Ramadan or Christmas—the check included a crisp new one hundred dollar bill as bonus. And so, without wondering, because he loved his work of a lifetime, of many lifetimes, Abner worked with serenity and satisfaction in the vast, tiny, narrow and limitless cartography shop in the shadowy, dismal, perfectly pleasant narrow alley three streets off the bustling thoroughfares of that immense metropolitan nexus that might, at other times, have been Avalon or Tyre or Carthage, might have been Marrakech or Constantinople or Vienna, but was only, in truth, for going on sixty-six years at this location, the hamlet of Chicago.

"I will, I must say, hate to see me go. Abandoning the work to Replogle and Rand McNally will be ... well, of course, they're very fine people, and they try to do their best, but I think they still use that silly Here There Be Dragons at the edge of the drop-off."

I stammered and heard myself babbling. "We, that is to say, WorldSpan, has just completed on-orbit checkout and synchronization of our three geodetic polar orbital satellites, all of which are in geosynchronous configurations 22,300 miles above the planet, all with completely automated computer-driven cartography programs." His eyes were wide as I gibbered, unable to stop myself: I'd rehearsed all this, straight from the tech memoranda, on the plane, not knowing who or what Abner Wonacott was going to be. And now I couldn't shut up. "These are electro-optical imaging satellites. We now have a multi-planar, LEO, MEO, and GEO corporate capability to provide under-an-hour mapping and geospatial products to our worldwide customers. We can 'direct-task' both an electro-optical and hyperspectral satellite to image any 100 x 100 kilometer swath on Earth. We can employ our highly refined processing algorithms which allow us to ... levels of reflectance ... hundreds of spectral bands ..."

I ran down. So ashamed of myself. Just so damned damned *ashamed* of what I'd let you make of me, Howard. I wanted to sink through the unseen, misty floor. I felt like a giant gobbet of crap. And Abner Wonacott just stared at me.

"So I am the relic from an earlier time," he said. "I seem to be, as they put it, redundant. Well, that must be it, then, of course." He slid off his high perch and put his hands on my shoulders. He was taller than I'd thought.

"What is your name, young man?"

"Charlie Trimbach, sir."

"Ah. Yes, of course, I do indeed remember the bronze medal and how you cried. Well, let me say this, Master Charles Trimbach: you are a very nice young man. You need not be so unforgiving, of yourself, and of those for whom you labor. You have turned out to be an absolutely imperial young man, and I hold no bad cess for your having come to deliver this nasty news."

I handed him the envelope containing the severance check. Though how you could pay him for what must have been hundreds of years of maps, well, I don't know; I just don't know.

He reached into a shelf beneath the slant-top of his desk, and removed a derby hat. He placed it carefully on his head at a rakish angle, took one last look around the shop—the greenery seemed to rustle a farewell—and he walked me to the door.

We stepped out into the Chicago night. It was lit by a full moon. He closed the door behind us, and turned to me as he locked up. "But with all your capacity for producing a map down to the last grain of sand in the Gobi, Charlie, the sad thing is that now and forevermore no one will be able to provide the questing customer with a route to Baskerville Hall, or Riallaro, or Nimmr in the Valley of the Sepulchre. With the closing of this little oasis, Charlie, your little civilization loses for all time to come. There is no Charta Caelestis for the improbable."

And when I turned back to see, the shop was gone. It was now a boarded-up derelict, what had once been a deli or a place where they sold banded 12-packs of socks. Seconds.

Abner Wonacott and I walked out into the street, left the alley, and headed toward the city lights. It was terribly cold, that special awful Chicago cold that makes you think of the end of the world. He held his derby on with one hand and hunched deeper inside his jacket. I wished I'd brought a heavier topcoat. It hadn't been supposed to get this cold, this soon.

"What will you do now?" I asked him.

He shrugged. "Perhaps I'll retire somewhere nice and warm. I hear Boca is pleasant."

I wanted to cry. Just like that, so damned casually, I'd made everything go sour in the world. I fingered the bronze medal fob on my watch chain. I was a bad person, no matter what the old mapmaker said to ease my guilt. A bad person. I told him that. He smiled wryly and said, "Most of us think we're more important than we really are, Charlie. The universe isn't watching. It mostly, for the most part, doesn't care."

And at that moment, before I could wallow much more in sophomoric self-pity, a stout lady with one of those wire shopping baskets on wheels came up to us, and she looked at Abner Wonacott, the one man who could actually tell you where King Kong resided, and she said, "Excuse me, mister, is there a Domenick's around here?"

"No, not too close," he said. "There *was* an A&P for a long time, but it's gone. I think there's a Jewel Supermarket about a mile toward Lincoln Park, but ... oh, wait a moment ... yes, now that I recall, yes indeed there *is* a Domenick's.

"You'll have to go over three blocks that way, and then go left for two more blocks to ..."

He paused, looked thoughtful for a moment, then reached into his inside jacket pocket and brought out a lovely fountain pen and a pad. "Here," he said, "let me draw you a map."

And all at once, the wind wasn't nearly as cold as it had been; and the night was not nearly as empty. ❧

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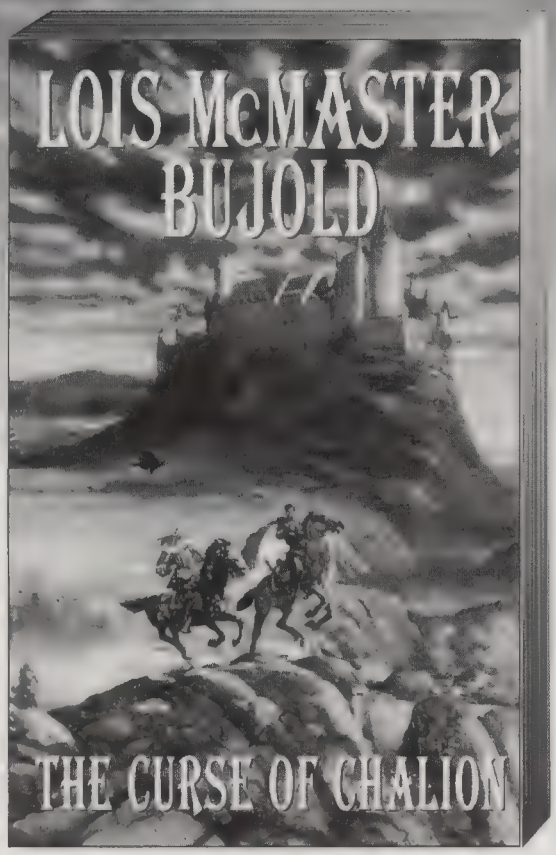

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Wait-A-While

There is innocence and beauty left in the world. You just have to look farther, longer, and harder than you might dream.

Michael Covey had come to Queensland looking for inspiration, and had found only beer. Beer and overwhelming heat, suffocating humidity, subtle bigotry, and an all-pervasive tropical dulling of the senses inconducive to cogent thought, much less the novel he hoped to write.

The bar in the hotel was solid Daintree hardwood, cut from the center of a single tree. From where he sat near the far end it looked expansive enough to handle the landing of a small plane. Dark brown veined with black, it resembled a slab of meat sliced from some dinosaurian flank. Sparkling empty glasses dangled like crystalline grapes from crazed brass piping. Spotted throughout the vast Byzantine reaches of the restaurant, potted plants squatted forlornly, as if marooned in amber. Smoked windows kept the unyielding equatorial sun at bay.

By Alan Dean Foster
Illustration by Scott Grimando

Covey sat alone at the bar. It was midday, a time when the rest of the hotel's guests were out swimming, diving, sightseeing, and shopping, their relentless desperation to enjoy themselves as remorseless as the sun. Through a vast picture window he watched a quartet of Japanese golfers putting their way through the 10th green, little mechanical wind-up figures in perfectly pressed slacks and shirts that somehow defied the pitiless humidity.

Lucky bastards. They don't have to think for a living. The only thing that torments them is fear of failing to please one boss-san. He sipped cold lager.

The bartender was pale, blond, athletic, Aussie; fertile ground for skin cancer. Covey was lean, tired, nondescript; a candidate for artistic anonymity. No matter where he went, no matter how often he traveled, the one thing he could not escape the incontestable mediocrity of his talent.

"Hot," Covey muttered.

"Too right." A damp cloth shushed over the counter, slick as skis on fresh powder. Ceiling fans whirred softly overhead, agitating the cold air-conditioned atmosphere that tried to hug the tiled marble floor.

> Any inspiration to be found out here would be green-tinged.

Covey shifted his butt, straightening slightly on his stool, abruptly overwhelmed with the urge to confess. "I'm a writer. I make a very nice living because I have written 24 novels."

"Good on ya, mate."

"No it isn't. It isn't good on me at all. It sucks. You want to know why?" Of course the bartender wanted to know why. It was his job. "Because all 24 are exactly alike. The titles differ, so do some of the details, but basically I've been writing the same goddamn book over and over again for the past 20 years. Each year they sell a few more copies, and each year I get a little more in royalties and a little more disgusted with myself. Because I know I can write something else, something better." The sanctity of the confessional was interrupted by the arrival of a trio of middle-aged white men. They entered the bar cackling with Midwestern twang. Covey tried to ignore them.

"That's why I came here. To find inspiration. To expose myself to new surroundings, new ideas." He held up the empty lager bottle. "So far I have found only this, and it is not worth even a novelette."

"I tell ya, they were buck naked, the both of 'em!"

"Gawann, Fred." The doubter wore plaid shorts and a white tennis shirt stretched taut over the anchored blimp of his belly.

"He's tellin' the truth, Jimmy. They weren't bad lookers, either." A dirty snigger punctuated the observation propounded by the third man. "Shoulda seen the wife's reaction to 'em. Edith like to've peed in her pants." The trio chortled as one, the Topeka chorus distinctly unmelodic. The sound grated on the smooth stone of the floor.

" We tried to get the driver to stop," said the first speaker. "Dumb Aussie ignored us. Said we were seeing things. That there wasn't nobody living in that part of the rainforest, naked or otherwise. But I seen 'em." He leaned forward, squinching the belly. "Bill did too."

"That's right." The second man nodded solemnly. "Buck naked, they was."

An irritated Covey watched as the three traversed the length of the bar like oysters escaping a buffet. "What do you suppose that was all about?" He looked back to the bartender. "You have naked women living in your jungle?"

"Rainforest." The bartender corrected him without looking up from his work. "Maybe."

Covey chuckled, reached for his glass, hesitated. Something in the younger man's tone …

"It's a joke, right? You're goofing on me."

"No joke, mate. It's a woman and her daughter, fair dinkum. Eleven years they been out there. Live off they land, they do. So people say."

Covey pushed his glass aside. "Why? Why would anyone want to do that? Much less a mother and daughter."

The bartender turned away, hunkering down with the air of a man who'd already said too much. "Their business. Why ask me? You're the writer."

"I'm a novelist, not a reporter." There's something here, he found himself thinking. Something in what's not been said. Was it worth checking out? On the face of it, the story belonged near the top of the bullshit probability index. Doubtless the bartender had overheard the three clowns from Kansas as clearly as his customer had and had improvised a good gag on the spot.

But the way Covey was feeling, anything was better than flying home to face the accusatory sameness of book 25 and the screeching inadequacy of his meager, overpaid talent.

"I don't believe you, of course, but certain of my fellow travelers whom I've been unable to avoid keep insisting I ought to see some of the jung … rainforest before I go home. Assuming I give it a try, how might I find these antepodean naiads?"

"You don't. They live up in the backside of the Daintree." As bartenders do, the young Aussie busied himself polishing a glass. "You don't find anybody in the Daintree. It's a garden God planted and then forgot about. Nobody'll take you in the back of in there."

Digging into a pocket, Covey extracted a thick wad of traveler's checks. Very slowly and deliberately he signed the one on top. "Nobody?" Purple print caused the young bartender to waver his better judgment.

"Maybe one bloke. But he's mad." The traveler's check vanished. "If you're so flamin' sure it's a joke, why're you suddenly so keen on checkin' it out?"

Covey stared across at him out of eyes that could not see quite far enough. "Since me and my writing are something of a joke, I don't see the contradiction in following up on another."

Boris Schneemann didn't act crazy, but he sure as hell looked the part, Covey decided, mentally recording the man's vitals for future literary abstraction. Six-two, 210, crowned by a mat of scraggly black hair that glistened with some kind of internal ooze, he regarded the world unblinkingly while perspiring like an asphalt-layer working Phoenix streets in mid-July. Originally from a corner of Germany he declined to identify more than vaguely, he'd migrated to Northeast Australia 14 years

ago. Now he grew bananas and dogs when not running tourists into the Daintree.

A series of short scars ran across his Roman bridge of a nose, fossilized evidence of some ancient battle in which an opponent had tried to remove the protuberance via amateur rhinoplasty. This and other aspects of personality and self suggested that in Deutschland Schneeman had been something other than a farmer of edible fruits and lover of dogs. Covey chose not to probe too deeply too soon into his guide's hazy history.

The battered gray Toyota Landcruiser was to cars what a professional wrestler was to a surgeon. It did not so much drive over the road as intimidate it.

"Ninety thousand new she cost me." Schneeman railed against faceless bureaucrats as the Landcruiser slammed contemptuously through a bottomless pothole, sending Covey's brains ricocheting off the top of his skull. "*Auschloch* import duties! Can buy nothing reasonable in this country unless it's made here." He pointed to his right.

"See that tree? Tulga. Forty thousand dollar it worth, just standing there. Most places people poach animals. Here they try to steal trees."

"Tell me about the women." Covey's fingers were white and numb from clinging to the handgrip bolted above the passenger-side window. The so-called road they were careening down like a runaway Baja racer, the Inside Bloomfield Track, continued snaking its way through towering green walls. The roadbed was yellow-brown, the narrow strip of sky overhead bright blue, and the rest of the universe alternating shades of green hothouse gloom.

"Not much to tell, Mike Covey. They been back in here long time."

"So you believe in them, too?"

Schneeman was silent for a while, concentrating on the road. "Ya." He spoke softly for a change, scratching the back of his head. "Ya, I believe in them."

"Any idea how old they are?" Covey was making mental notes.

"Mother and daughter. The girl, she would be about 17, I'd say."

"And the local school authorities don't mind that she's not in school?"

The front end of the Landcruiser went temporarily airborne and the impact when it touched down stunned Covey's sacrum.

"Oh sure, they mind. Every once in a while somebody go looking for them to bring in the daughter. School nannies, social services. They never find them."

"I was told that you could."

The burly German laughed like a demented Santa Claus. "What fool bloke guy told you that? I can track them … sometimes. Naked footsprints in the mud, two sets. You follow them." There was a curious edge in his voice. "Over ridges, through trees, across streams. Until they disappear. Always," he muttered more to himself than to his passenger, "they disappear."

Covey began to worry that the bartender's appraisal of the guide's sanity was nearer the mark than he'd been willing to countenance when he'd hired the man. He gazed out the window. Any inspiration to be found out here would be green-tinged.

"Yeah, sure. They 'disappear.'"

Schneemann shrugged massively. "Maybe they go up in the trees, ya? Maybe they fly away."

"How can they survive in this? I mean, what do they eat?"

"Mango, paw-paw, lychee, possum, snake: plenty *für essen* in the rainforest." He gripped the wheel with both hands. "You hang on, Mike Covey. All the good road, she behind us now."

Covey swallowed hard and wondered what the hell he was trying to prove.

They spent the night on hard beds in a tiny youth hostel situated in the absolute middle of green nowhere. The ramshackle clapboard and metal structure squatted by the side of the track like a corrugated boil engulfed in green. It was designed to serve backpackers, which excused Covey. The only backpacking he'd done in his life was from shopping cart to car trunk. His idea of a nature walk was crossing Central Park from the Met to the American Museum.

Eventually they abandoned the track entirely as Schneemann turned up a shallow stream, the Landcruiser grinding and sloshing its way over a pavement composed of water-polished pebbles and punky driftwood. Eels and crayfish fled the crunching tires.

As the guide explained, the unpaved Inside Bloomfield track simply paralleled the coast. No roads led straight inland, into the heart of the mountainous rainforest. There was nowhere for any to go, and no way for them to get there.

When even the rugged, determined vehicle could advance no farther, Schneemann parked it on a rocky beach and broke out the packs. Covey struggled awkwardly with the straps. Giant electric blue Ulysses and emerald-green Cairns' Birdwing butterflies fluttered through the trees and over the stream. Each time one traversed a shaft of sunlight, a burst of unbelievable color exploded against his retinas. An effervescent column of soldier ants the color of key lime pie marched across the buttressing root of a nearby white cedar. A splotch of flaming orange skimmed the glassy surface of the stream, marking the quicksilver passage of a marauding kingfisher.

Covey could not remember when heavy sweat hadn't coated his body. It mixed with obligatory insect repellent to form a thin, stinking paste that clung to his hot, damp skin, smothering the pores. The German chose a direction seemingly at random and struck off, leaving the huffing, perspiring Covey to follow as best he could.

The crowns of Alexandra palms burst like green fireworks overhead, blotting out the sky. His hiking shoes kicked up leaf litter and mold, sending tiny black shapes with too many legs scattering in search of fresh cover.

Schneemann paused by a patch of sunlight, his machete singling out a small, innocuous-looking plant with six-inch-wide, slightly pebbled leaves. "This here is worst thing in the forest, my friend. Stinging tree. Those serrated leaves, they covered with glass spines. Glass! Each one is like a little hypodermic, *verstehen?* All full of a powerful alkaloid poison. Once they get in your skin, they stay there because they silicate composition, not wood. Each time you rub, or splash on cold water, or walk into an air-conditioned room, they release a little bit more poison. The pain can last six months to two years.

"I hear of one guy get a bunch all in his face. He went mad and killed himself."

The warning was wasted on Covey, who'd resolved immediately upon leaving the Landcruiser to avoid physical contact with everything in the forest, be it dead or alive.

It rained all that afternoon and through the night, a heavy, warm, vertical deluge that their tent shed with admirable efficiency. Sitting in a steady downpour while simultaneously perspiring heavily was an experience Covey would gladly have

done without.

They crossed two more ridges, scrambling up slick rock and mud only to stumble and slide down the far side. Covey didn't dare grab a tree or branch for support for fear it would bite back.

The constant drizzle was only a prelude to what Schneemann referred to as the Big Wet, the real rainy season. That could begin any day now, he declared jovially. His announcement failed to inspire Covey to greater effort.

When he lost his footing for the hundredth time and slid 20 feet downhill on the waterlogged, torn butt-end of his pants, he finally cast aside the unnatural, enforced stoicism under which he'd been laboring for days. By the time the German reached him Covey had removed his pack and slung it to the ground.

"Fuck this, Boris! I thought you knew where the hell you were going. I thought you knew what you were doing. You've been leading me around in circles like a prize porker so you can scam as much per diem out of my hide as you think you can get away with! I've got fungus growing between my toes, an itching in my crotch that won't go away, my clothes are starting to stink on my back, and I think all the goddamn rain's starting to affect my hearing." Bending over and breathing hard, he rested his mud-caked hands on his knees as he stared up at the impassive German.

"I've had it with this, *mein führer*. You understand? You *versteht* ,or whatever the hell it is you do?"

Schneemann seemed not to hear. His thick, black brows resembled mating caterpillars as he intently scanned the opposite hillside. Finally he shrugged. "We got enough supplies to go another week."

Covey inhaled deeply, straightened. "Fuck that. And fuck this country, too. It is my fervent hope that they log it to the ground." Turning to his left, he spat out an earthy mixture of earth, rainwater, and saliva. Angrily snatching his pack from the mud, he started forward.

A dark, hirsute mountain, the German blocked his path, smiling down at him.

"What the hell are you grinning at?" Covey snapped.

The guide held out an astonishingly clean hand. "You forget our contract, my friend. One third when we start, another when we turn back, the last when I set you down, all nice and refreshed again, in your fancy hotel in Port Douglas.

Covey gaped at him, blinking drizzle from his eyes. "You want money *now*, here?"

Schneemann twitched slightly. "It's the contract, yes?"

"Shit," Covey mumbled. He dragged out his shrinking packet of travelers' checks and signed several over. Schneemann fanned them like a poker hand and frowned.

"I know you are a writer, Michael Covey, and not an accountant. This is a little short. One hundred U.S. dollars short."

Covey took a step backward. "That was going to be your bonus if we found the women. We didn't find them."

"I say I take you to where they live." He made a sweeping gesture with his free hand. "This is where they live."

Covey pursed his lower lip. "I don't see no women—mate."

The German's expression darkened. "Don't joke with me, *Herr* writer. Especially about money."

"Believe me, humor's the last thing on my mind. You've spent a week dragging me through God's own green shithouse and you've enjoyed every minute of it." He smiled nastily. "Now it's my turn to enjoy something."

Schneemann took a step forward, halted. "I could make you sign another check, *ya*. But maybe you bring charges. All writers are crazy like that. So have it your way, my friend. Maybe I see you again in Port Douglas. Maybe not."

Without another word he whirled and started off, ascending without effort the slope they had only recently clambered down.

Covey yelled imprecations in his wake. "Yeah, that's right, go on and leave me here, jerkoff! I can find my own way back, you Teutonic asshole! You think I can't? You think I can't? Just watch me, man!"

Schneemann did not reply. In a very few minutes the forest had swallowed him up.

It began to rain harder.

Screw him, Covey thought furiously. It was more downhill than up all the way back. Just keep heading east and eventually he would hit the road and then the ocean. He had a week's worth of supplies in his pack and he wasn't sorry to see the departure of the sauna-like tent. What the hell, he was soaked through anyway. His light sleeping bag would do him. And he was ahead a hundred bucks, maybe more.

As for inspiration, he couldn't wait to get home and write down an account of his experiences. His agent would be intrigued. A horror novel would be an interesting departure for his client. He could call it *A Stroll Through the Green Hell* … or had that already been used?

He had learned that when the sun went down behind the rain it got dark fast in the rainforest. Selecting a spot between the meandering roots of a massive tree, he tore down some huge pandanus leaves and improvised a roof. Quite satisfied in his righteous anger, he settled down to await the arrival of the dawn.

It took him two days to admit that he was lost. He was reasonably certain he was still traveling east, but it might have been northwest, or southwest. Or maybe not. The permanent, oppressive cloud cover and constant rain made it difficult to guess direction. Everything looked the same: every tree, every slope, every mocking, crystal-clear rivulet and stream. Sometimes he'd confront a sheer drop-off or impenetrable vegetation and have to backtrack. There were no landmarks; only rocks, mud, and claustrophobic verdure.

So far, he'd managed to avoid the stinging trees, but between the inevitable slips and falls and the occasional inimical thorn bush he was pretty well torn up. In the dank confines of the forest several of the cuts were already beginning to fester. There was a warm, wet soreness under his heels where several blisters had popped. Yesterday he'd found a leech on his right ankle and in a paroxysm of disgust had unthinkingly and unwisely pulled it off. Despite his best efforts, it continued to bleed.

His hat was gone and so was much of his food. Several times exhaustion and desperation had overcome his pride and he'd yelled out the guide's name. If Schneemann was secretly dogging his footsteps, waiting for him to admit defeat, the German was taking his time about it. Surely the guide wouldn't simply abandon an outsider to fend for himself in dangerous country like this? No professional would do such a thing.

But a crazy man might.

There was a slight break in the trees ahead, barely visible through the rain. He angled toward it, hoping to find a stream that flowed east toward the sea. Perspiration blended with rainwater stung his eyes. His breathing came in long, labored wheezes now.

Someone jabbed a white-hot fishhook into his right forearm.

He howled and looked down at himself. Two narrow lengths of vine lay snugged against his bare, wet flesh. When he tried to pull away they clung to him like green steel. Forcing himself to stand absolutely motionless, he contemplated the growth which had trapped him.

Forcing himself to stand absolutely motionless, he regarded the growth which had trapped him.

It wasn't a stinging tree, thank God. Inspecting his arm, he made out two parallel sets of backward-curving thorns running along the underside of each vine. These natural hooks were deeply embedded in his skin. Little bubbles of blood rose from the place where each thorn had penetrated. They continued to swell until rain washed them away.

To his horror, the vines seemed to contract around his arm even as he studied the phenomenon.

"Don't move."

The voice startled him and he jerked involuntarily, sending fresh agony rippling through his flesh. Trembling slightly from the pain, he forced himself to stand still.

She glistened in the rain, naked and supple as a cream-colored seal. Her auburn hair was neatly combed and unmatted, though the rain made it stick to her exposed skin. She had deep, dark eyes and a slim, though mature, body. Her mouth was small and moist, and her leonine muscularity reminded him of slow-motion film he'd seen of professional marathon runners. Transfixed by both pain and surprise, he stared as she gently disengaged first one vine, then the other, from the meat of his upper arm. She offered him a half-smile.

"Wait-a-while." Gripping it carefully by the edges, she held up one vine for closer inspection. He flinched away. "See? The thorns are barbed. Once you're hooked, the only way to free yourself is by backing up slowly. Move in any other direction and the barbs only dig in deeper." Her smile widened. "It's also called Lawyer's Cane."

A shaken Covey sat down and felt of his injured arm. She eyed him curiously.

"What are you doing out here?"

He tried not to stare at the raindrops slithering down through her breasts and crotch. "I was looking for you."

Her smile vanished and she looked around anxiously. "Why?"

He managed a filthy grin of his own. "I'm a writer. I was looking for inspiration for a new book." When he lifted his arm, pain lanced through him and he winced. "I think I should've stuck to rewriting my old ones. My name's Covey. Mike Covey."

She was watching him closely. "No one told you my name, then?" He shook his head, momentarily too tired and too full of self-pity to care about much of anything else. "I'm Annabelle." She looked to her right. "That's my daughter, Leea. Leea, come say hello."

The girl was a slightly taller version of her mother, only blue-eyed and with hair that verged on the color of night. When her mother called to her she was sitting in a nearby tree, her legs dangling from a thick lower branch. As an exhausted Covey looked on she lowered herself to the ground with an easy grace and agility that was breathtaking.

Had she been there all along? he wondered. Would she have watched in silence as he'd torn his arm to pieces trying to free himself? She slowed as she approached, while the mother regarded him with a strange mixture of curiosity and sadness.

"Where's your home?" he asked. "Do you have a lean-to, or a cabin out here, or something?"

"We build shelters when and where we need them. We like to move around a lot. Is this how you find your inspiration, by asking questions?"

"I can't say, not having found any yet."

Shading her eyes, she tilted her head back. "Soon the afternoon rain will begin. The Big Wet is coming. If you don't get out of the forest before it starts you'll be stuck in here 'til March."

As he sat and watched, the two women quickly and without a single tool cobbled together an adequate shelter out of the forest material at hand. When Annabelle directed him to crawl inside he did not object. He was too worn out to object to anything. Then they left.

She glistened in the rain, naked and supple as a cream-colored seal.

Just as he had decided they didn't intend to come back and he would never see either of them again, they returned bearing armfuls of fruit. There were also large, white, fat insect grubs the taste of which despite his hunger he felt obliged to decline. Using fingernails and teeth, they peeled the various fruits as deftly as any monkey.

Later, with his belly full and feeling considerably better, he lay back against the gray rock that formed the rear of the shelter and gazed out at the monotonous scree of falling rain. As always, there was no need for a fire. To make conversation he asked the woman about the rainforest. She had an answer or explanation for everything. Sensibly, he did not try to inquire about her past or how she came to be in her present situation.

"I need to find certain plants to treat your wounds," she told him the next morning, "or you're going to develop some severe infections. A couple have already started to ulcerate." Crawling to the shelter's opening, she glanced back in at him. "Don't try to go anywhere."

"Fat chance of that," he murmured.

They'd been gone less than an hour when a shape returned. The daughter entered wordlessly. In the warm confines of the shelter he could not avoid her, nor did he try to. Her nipples brushed his bare arm as she sat down next to him, folding her thighs up against her chest and clasping her arms around her knees. Outside, the early morning drizzle obscured the rest of the world.

"Tell me," she whispered in a small voice, "about the city. Mother's told me a little, most of it bad. But I don't see how anyplace so interesting can be all bad." Her voice overflowed with eagerness. "I want to know."

So without a moment's thought or pause, he told her, describing life not only in the cities of his own country but in those of other lands as well. He tried to impart to her some of the excitement of Chicago, the glamour of Los Angeles, the culture of New York. She listened raptly, hanging on his every word, only occasionally inter-

rupting with a question.

Her manner of speech was devoid of guile and long words but otherwise proper and correct. Apparently her mother had not wished her to dwell entirely in ignorance green. She had been given some home, or rather forest, schooling.

Eventually he felt secure enough in her presence to ask a few questions of his own, keeping an eye on the opening in expectation of the mother's return. "Leea, how do you come to be here, to live like this in this place?"

She replied ingenuously. "I don't exactly know. I was only seven when mother brought us to the rainforest." Her smile was as radiant and unspoiled as the rest of her, he mused. "We've been here ever since."

> The wait-a-while would hold them close even as it kept them apart.

"Hasn't it been lonely for you without any other children to grow up with?"

"Oh no. There was always mother, and the animals. I've had every kind of pet you can imagine. Pythons, until they got too big, and cockatoos, and possums, and sugar gliders. I've always had playmates."

"But you'd still like to visit a city?"

She nodded thoughtfully. "I think so. I wouldn't want to live in one, though. I don't think I could, after living in the forest."

"What about … not having any clothes?"

She shrugged. "I've seen other people. I don't understand clothes. You dry off much faster without them, and it hardly ever gets cold here."

"What about people who come looking for you? Aren't you afraid they might see you like this?"

"Well you're looking at me right now, and I'm not afraid." Here was a directness of logic he rarely encountered and could not argue with. "Besides, if we don't want to be seen by other people, we're not."

"You can't move around all the time, Leea. You can't continue to dodge the rest of the world your whole life. People will find you, eventually."

"Not if we don't want them to." There was a certainty to her claim that puzzled and intrigued him. "We just walk into the Dreamtime."

He frowned. "I've heard of that. It's the name for the aborigine spirit world, isn't it?"

She nodded enthusiastically. "Something like that. There are lots of them around here. Mostly in the Dreamtime. They've gone there to get away from this world. Modern Aussie people did bad things to them, so they left. Those who knew how. Sometimes mother and I talk to them, and they teach us things. Like how to live in the forest. They taught us how to find the Dreamtime. There's a lot of it in the Daintree."

He shook his head impatiently. "Leea, the Dreamtime is myth. It's the collected stories of a people. They're very beautiful, but they're just stories."

Her smile and her eyes were full of secrets, like pearls at the bottom of a dark, dark pool. "The deeper you go into the Daintree, the closer you get to the Dreamtime, Michael. This is one of the oldest forests that was on the Earth, one of the first, and the Dreamtime is the first place. They're very near to one another. You just have to know how to look."

Girl, I've spent my whole life trying to learn how to look. Her mother has fed her this, he realized suddenly. To keep her here, away from civilization, away from other people. But why?

"We just find a piece of the Dreamtime and go in," she was saying. "The people who are looking for us walk right past. They don't see us. They don't know how to find the Dreamtime, so they don't see it, either."

"What's it like?" He wondered what a psychologist would make of her delusions.

She lapsed into dreamy, exquisite reminiscence. "A lot of it's forest, like this, before the loggers and highway people came. There are no cities, no airplane tracks in the sky. No white people. Only the aborigines, and mother and I. It's like it was when the Earth was before people."

There was movement outside. Annabelle entered, clutching a handful of leaves and stems that were oozing sap. "This won't take long." She didn't even glance in her daughter's direction.

She's crazier than Schneemann, isolating herself and her daughter out here like this. Warily, he eyed the vegetation she'd brought back.

The poultice she fashioned lessened the fire in his wounds. He was even less eager to sip the tea she brewed, but did not know how to refuse. It put him to sleep almost immediately.

When he awoke, stiff and cramped but otherwise feeling better, they had both gone.

Staggering out of the shelter, he stumbled into full, searing sunshine. He felt himself blinded by a thousand green mirrors. Thick gray mist clung to treetops where unseen lorikeets fussed. The air had the clarity of a sudden vision.

"Annabelle!" He turned a slow circle as he shouted. "Leea!" Within his limited range of vision, nothing moved. There was no reply.

"Leea!"

He thought he heard a voice. Most probably it was some kind of animal, but he pursued it anyway. It was all there was.

The voices grew louder, contentious. Among them was one deeper than any he'd heard in days. Eyes widening, he increased his pace, suddenly heedless of the possibility of encountering stinging trees, or worse.

He came up short, breathing hard, on the steep bank of a deep gully. Leea was there, her hands cupped over her mouth, eyes wide and staring. He could hear her muffled screams clearly.

Boris Schneemann, his agonized face framed by his wild black mane, knelt by the drop-off. His thick, callused hands clutched the edge and he was sobbing and screaming in a berserk, unintelligible mix of German, French, and English.

Not far below him the twisted, naked form of Annabelle hung crucified in a tangled mat of wait-a-while. Where the unrelenting vines had torn her flesh, blood flowed freely in thin, viscous streamlets. Her head was bent back so far that Covey could not see her face. It rested at an angle unnatural to her shoulders. One large vine was

wrapped tightly around her neck.

The anguish that welled up unexpectedly in his throat far exceeded anything he felt in his arm or feet. Anger glazed his eyes as he rushed forward. Leea turned to him, her ethereally beautiful unblemished face wide-eyed with shock. Schneemann rose slowly. Then he threw back his head and shook his clenched fists at whatever gods hid behind the mist-shrouded sky, screaming in guttural, uncontrollable, wretched German.

"You rotten, rotten bastard." Covey eyed the other man carefully as he approached. "What the fuck happened?"

Schneemann suddenly became aware of his presence. "It was an accident. She would not listen. I only wanted to talk and she would not listen. She ran from me. Toward the Dreamtime, she said. Where she would be safe. Crazy, crazy! *Gott in himmel.* She ran and she fell." He looked down. "There." He inhaled massively, then turned, and before she could retreat, grabbed Leea's wrist. "You. Leea. You are all that is left. You come back with me now."

The girl stared at him, half-mad with terror and despair. "N-no. I don't want to go with you. I don't want to."

"You must. Now."

"NO!" She dug her heels into the mud, sliding forward as he dragged her, beating at him with her free hand. He took no notice of the feeble resistance.

The air went out of him when Covey tackled him around both legs. They went down in a damp, muddy heap. Covey struck out blindly, furiously, slamming fist after fist into the German's face. With a roar like a wounded rhino, von Schneemann threw him off.

Rolling over, Covey saw the guide grinning insanely back at him. The big man was back on his feet, tense as a panther, a knife clutched in his right fist. In Covery's eyes the short, thick blade loomed as large as a ceremonial sword. Reaching up, he felt blood streaming from his nose.

"So little writer wants to fight, eh?" Covey scrambled to his feet, only to find himself caught between the drop-off and his opponent. "You *verdampt* swine, you niggly little son-of-a-bitch. Ten years I spend looking for these two. Ten years of my life hacking and sweating at this stinking jungle, and you, city-man, *you* find them. And then she don't listen to me." His face contorted and he began to sob anew.

"No more Anna. No more Anna! She wouldn't listen to me," he bawled. "I just wanted to talk." The sobbing snapped like a worn tape. A rictus of gut-seated pain, the kind that twists bowels and haunts eyes, made a horrible, inhuman mask of his face. "Ten years, little writer. Ten long, terrible years tearing me to tiny pieces. Ten years in which to think too much."

"She's dead." Covey's gaze hung on the point of the knife as intently as if he were tracking the movements of a weaving cobra. "What do you want from the girl? Leave her alone!"

Schneemann stared at him out of eyes that were dull and empty, like a shark's. "What do I want from her? You stupid, brainless American shit, *she's my daughter!*" With a rasping cry of inhuman rage and frustration he threw himself forward, a black-maned juggernaut wielding a knife that gleamed like death itself in the hazy light.

Covey tried to block the thrust. As he did so he lost his footing in the mud and fell. The knife sliced air above his head as the onrushing German tried to redirect his bull-like charge. His legs struck Covey's sprawling form and the bigger man tripped over him.

He went over the drop without a sound.

"Christ." Covey scrambled to the edge on hands and knees. Schneemann lay on his back on a barbed pillow of wait-a-while, the knife protruding from his chest like fresh, new rainforest growth. His eyes stared sightlessly at the sky. Drizzle filled the sockets, masking the pupils, spilling over both sides of his face in tiny twin waterfalls. The naked woman who had given birth to his daughter lay nearby, in death enshrouded by the rainforest she had loved: the greenery that had sheltered her, fed her, and ultimately protected her from her abusive, enraged lover for 10 long years of hiding and wandering.

The wait-a-while would hold them close even as it kept them apart.

Fighting to catch his breath, Covey rose slowly and turned. Leea was nowhere to be seen.

He ran to the edge of the dense undergrowth. "Leea! Leea!" Ignoring the thorns and vines that tore at him, restrained him, deliberately held him back, he searched for her all the rest of that dreadful day and all the next, screaming her name at the silent, uncaring trees.

"LEEA! LEEA, I LOVE YOU! LEE-AAAAA!"

Two days later his food ran out. He kept going, eating what fruits he could scavenge, trying and failing to kill small animals. Eventually he was reduced to scrabbling for lizards and insects, until they too were insufficient to replenish his strength.

He lasted three more days before he collapsed, half blind and utterly spent, on the soft, moist leaf litter that carpeted the forest floor.

"Leea ...," he sobbed. Something crawled onto his neck and bit, testing him. He did not have strength enough remaining to swat it away. The rain started; the warm, omnipresent rain, running into his ears and eyes. At least, he thought wearily, he would not die of thirst. He had heard it was a bad way to die.

He slept then. Later, he dreamed that something touched him, and struggled one final time to open his eyes.

For a local eccentric to vanish without warning was sufficient to raise a knowing alarm, but the disappearance of an international tourist was enough to bring out the police and forest rangers in full strength.

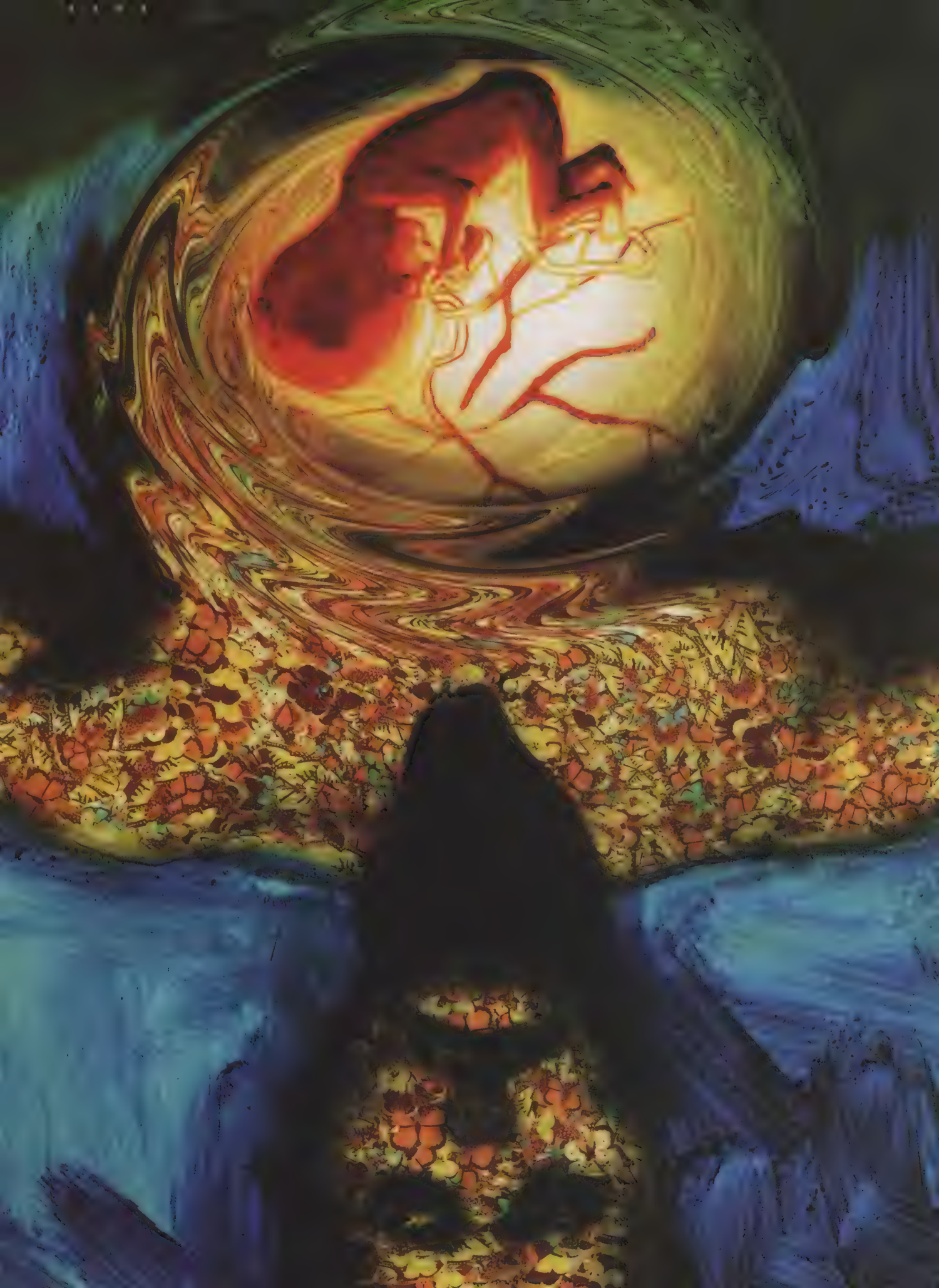
They found a collapsed, temporary shelter of sticks and leaves. Then they found the bodies of Boris Schneemann and his long-missing paramour. Carefully they hacked the bodies free from the tangle of wait-a-while, which even when severed seemed reluctant to let them go.

Of the American writer of modest reputation and desperate desire they found no sign. No tracks, no broken branches to show that he had once passed this way, no blood or bone. Then the Big Wet arrived with a vengeance and the search had to be called off. Nothing could move in the Daintree until it ended: hopefully some time in March.

The consensus among the rainforest-wise citizens of Mossman and Port Douglas was that with luck they might find his body come next year, perhaps washed down from the hills by the rains. He'd gone troppo for sure, stumbling madly off into the forest without direction or knowledge, searching for his envisioned inspiration.

What they did not, could not know, was that Michael Covey found it, though it was not of a kind he had ever imagined. It lay just a little farther on, just a shade deeper back in the dark green depths of the Daintree. If one looked long and hard enough, one could find anything in the Daintree. Even the Dreamtime. Even inspiration.

Even innocence. ❧



the Butterfly MAN

Eduardo Steinmetz was humming as he stopped in front of the examining room. It was August and the Red Sox looked like they might have a chance at the playoffs—he'd been hearing speculation spit and hiss over his radio as he'd driven into Boston this morning. Eduardo had arranged his life to allow for a certain cautious, tingling optimism that things were, for the most part, stable. He had decided happily that morning the Sox could reach the 1980 playoffs without disturbing his peace of mind.

The chart for the patient was in a holder on the door. He pulled it out and read it quickly. Linda Metzger, Date of Birth: 1962, Age: 18, Height: 5 feet 4 inches, Weight: 144, Condition of Pregnancy: 32nd week. There was only the naked phrase, No Previous Examination, in the history section of the report. That irritated him until he noticed the Boston welfare office stamp in the referral box. God knew when the welfare people would get around to anything. Nobody else did. Still, he thought, it would have been—prudent, shall we say?—to have the woman examined before the eighth month of her pregnancy.

Where there's life, there's death. How you cope with that thesis can be the most important thing.

By Steven Popkes
Illustration by Paul Lee

He looked around the office and saw nobody was watching. Then, he opened his mind to check the baby as he always did. It was easier that way; he didn't have to explain and examine the child at the same time. There was the usual inchoate swirl of obstetric clinic patter around him—the smell of disinfectant and burned milk—damn! I burned the formula.—Don't we have a shop steward? I mean, Jesus—Who the hell else do you think I should have voted for, Reagan? Are you nuts? It's 1980 after all.—You'd think it was the first time any woman ever had a baby. But they're all like that—then, he found the woman and reached in—

The Butterfly Man was waiting for him.

His face, hands, and body were composed entirely of wings and small black bodies. His eyes were the spots on butterfly wings. His mouth and lips were composed of small moths. His fingers glittered in the prismatic dust of tiny wings. Eduardo wondered, as he always wondered, if the Butterfly Man was a man covered with insects, or insects playing the part of a man. Their shifting bodies so obscured his form Eduardo could not tell.

"This is an ordinary examination," stammered Eduardo. "What do you want?"

"Come with me," said the Butterfly Man.

The Butterfly Man led Eduardo down a path through a verdant forest, tropical and steaming. The rain shook down through the trees and there was the smell of bougainvilleas and orchids. Animals watched him from the dark crevices of trees, from the ink shadows below leaves, but he could not see any more of them than their eyes.

"Can you feel it?" asked the Butterfly Man.

Eduardo could feel something, pulsing. The Butterfly Man crept effortlessly through a thick vegetative curtain. Eduardo had to struggle to spread it far enough apart to pass.

Before him was a clearing in whose center was a dark pool. The Butterfly Man stood opposite him and motioned him over.

"Look down, Eduardo," he said. "Look down."

Eduardo stood over it and looked down. The surface was still, but below, in the water, he saw furious circular motion. He stared hard into the center of the whirlpool, trying to see into its depths. It was malignantly empty.

He was halfway into the room before he knew what the Butterfly Man had shown him. The mother—Linda Metzger—looked up at him and smiled.

All of the baby's organs were functioning: heart, lungs, kidneys. But the baby had no brain. Anencephaly, he thought meticulously. At least that's what it felt like. The autopsy would bear him out. Eduardo knew, as no other doctor could, that the seat of humanity lay within the brain.

How do you tell a woman her unborn child is effectively dead?

Eduardo wanted to leave it to another doctor, but this woman had no other doctor. Some nameless social worker downtown had thought it was time—after eight months!—for Linda Metzger, Welfare Recipient, to go for a checkup. Six months ago the fetus could have been aborted and she could try again. But now …

The darkness drew him in.

"You're Doctor Steinmetz?" she looked up at him brightly. "The nurse said you were coming around."

Worse. She'd been a street prostitute—drugs? Probably. In a rare moment of clarity, he could see inside her: She'd come clean for this baby. Dropped the drugs and the hooking. *Doctor, how do you tell a working girl from anyone else?* He could see it even without his talent, in the wrinkles around her eyes and the color of her eyes. Her face had that thin, finely drawn look poor pregnant women get from too many starchy foods. Feed the fetus with food stamps.

"I am Doctor Steinmetz." Thus, we take refuge in titles.

"Eduardo Steinmetz? Spanish and German? Are you Puerto Rican or Mexican or what?" She peered at him closely. "I can't tell." She looked worried for a moment.

"I was adopted in Ecuador." You would think I would have some kind of plan down by now. Some method of telling people these sorts of things. "Mrs. Metzger—"

"I'm not really a 'missus.' I don't know which John gave me the baby but it's mine now." She looked at him fiercely, then at her stomach. "She's a quiet little baby. Hardly ever kicks me. You're the doctor. What do babies think about, anyway?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I was watching this hot show on the tube last night. Would she know anything about that? She's probably thinking about tiddy."

He stared at her stupidly. "Tiddy."

"Tits. Milk. That's probably what most babies think about, right?"

His face, hands, and body were composed entirely of wings and small black bodies. His eyes were the spots on butterfly wings.

They think about swimming, he thought. That's the closest description I could give you. Swimming in a sea, deep, dark, and silent. "I'd like to run a few tests," he said smoothly.

"Is there a problem?" She stared at him.

"No." Not yet. No one knows but me. When no one knows, how can there be a problem? "But you haven't been seen by a doctor in all this time and we should run a few tests."

She shrugged. "You can test all you want, Doc. I'm healthy as a horse."

He wrote down on the order sheet a normal battery of tests amid and around the one that counted: the ultrasound. Then, he fled to the nursing station and arranged to see her later that day after they had been performed. Already, he was thinking about how to tell her when he had proof. Luckily, his talent had shut back down to normal and all he could hear were the unborn children. Those officially sanctioned by birth had become blissfully silent.

There was no easy way to do this. He realized that when he came back that afternoon to a room identical to the one she'd been in that morning. He stood awkwardly with the pictures in his hand like a protective talisman.

"Mrs. Metzger," he put the pictures down and took her hands, "there's a problem."

"A problem?" Her voice grew high.

"Your baby …"

"What is wrong? Tell me!"

He waved her down. "You're baby has developed without a brain.

Its body is alive but its mind is dead."

Immediately, her hands held her stomach protectively.

"Excuse me?" she whispered.

"Mrs. Metzger, I am sorry to have to tell you this—"

"I heard you the fucking first time!" she suddenly screamed at him and began to cry. "I did everything right. I was so good. I dropped the needles as soon as I knew. I got myself checked out. But it was already too late, right? I thought she was so quiet. Just a quiet little girl …" Her voice trailed off and the tears just fell over her pinched, pale face. Eduardo reached for her hand but she struck his hand away.

She stared at him. "Just what the hell am I supposed to do now? Isn't it a little late to get an abortion?"

Eduardo spoke slowly. "The best thing for you, for your body, is to carry it to term. If we induced labor now, it would be very hard on you. Your body's not ready. It's better to let your body get ready to deliver it a bit more. In a few weeks—"

"A few weeks?"

"You would have to carry about six weeks more—"

"Carry Shawn? Shawn's dead."

"Not exactly. But it's better—"

"You want me to carry my dead baby inside me for a month and a *half*?"

Eduardo nodded. "That would be safest. Your body's not yet ready—"

"I didn't give up the needles to carry a corpse! I did everything right." She stared at her belly. "I just wanted a little girl."

"I know, Mrs. Metzger."

She looked at him as if for the first time. A dark expression of hate twisted her lips, her eyes, her fingers caressed her belly protectively. "Get out," she said finally.

He looked at his hands. "I am the bearer of bad news. Maybe you don't want to talk to me. Maybe you want a therapist. Let me send somebody else—"

"Send whoever you want to. But get out. Just get out."

Moira found him in the physician's lounge, wrung out, tired, and numb inside. "Jesus, Eddie, you look worse than Joe said you did." Moira sat next to him and took his hand. "Tough one?"

Eduardo held her hand and looked at it, saw her wedding ring shine on her finger, touched it like a magic talisman. "Little hooker from Atlantic Avenue. Got pregnant and decided to make something of her life."

"So?"

"Anencephaly. I had to tell her. After that, she wouldn't talk to me. I left instructions with the resident."

"A real tough one."

"They're all tough."

Moira didn't speak for a long moment and just held his hand. "How far along?"

"Thirty-two weeks."

Moira shook her head. "She was keeping herself clean for that long?"

"Yeah. It was her shining hope, I think."

"Oh, Eddie."

"Eighteen. At least that was the age on the chart. She could have been younger."

"Jesus." She started to reach for him, but stopped when he pulled slightly away from her. "It must have been hard on you."

"Harder on her."

"Damn it, Eddie, why the hell did you tell her?" she demanded suddenly.

Eduardo looked at her. "What are you saying?"

"Let one of the nurses do it. Or the O.B. on duty. It doesn't always have to be you." She smiled at him grimly. "I'm your wife, remember? I have a vested interest."

"It had to be me this time." Eduardo closed his eyes. "I don't want to fight."

Moira settled back against him. "OK. No fights."

Absently, then with a sudden strength as it penetrated she was there, truly there, he pulled her close. "I need cheering up. You have any horror stories for me?"

"No. Joe and I had an easy morning. Two sets of kidney stones and an inflamed gall bladder. Mostly I told a lot of people to quit smoking." Moira didn't speak for a moment. "Are you done for the day?"

"I still have a couple of patients."

"Can Laker take them?"

Eduardo shook his head. "There are a couple—"

"Anybody that Laker can't handle?"

"Well, no—"

"I'll tell him." Moira took him gently by the elbow. It seemed as if Eduardo was weightless as she drew him upright. "I'm your wife, Eddie. I want some of you left when I get off today. Go home. Right now if you told a woman she was going to give birth to Stravinsky, she wouldn't believe you." She propelled Eduardo toward the door.

"But—"

"Go home."

Before he left, he called the O.B. resident to see how Linda Metzger was doing.

"I went to see her as soon as I got the note," drawled the resident—a Midwesterner whose name Eduardo could never remember. "But she was gone."

"Gone?"

"Gone. Disappeared. Nada. The duty nurse said she just got dressed and walked out."

"Didn't anybody try to stop her?"

He could hear the resident shrug through the phone. "If you wanted her held until I got there, you should have told the nurse—not that it would have done any good. What were they going to stop her with? A gun? Anyway, she was gone when I got there."

"Damn it! When did you get there?"

"Like I told you—right after I got the note."

"When? Twenty minutes later? Thirty-five? An hour?"

The silence over the phone was frosty.

"You can look at the chart, doctor. The note and the time I received it is all in there. Now, is that all?"

"Yes." Eduardo hung up. The *pendejo* was right, but she was still gone. He should have sent the counselor in to see her. He should have stayed—he should have done almost anything but leave her right then. Stupid. Stupid.

Eduardo was still fuming when he reached his car in the hospital garage. He sat down and stared out the window morosely at the rain. At that moment, the tasteful Mercedes faintly disgusted him, its leather smell mingling with the stale urine smell of the garage. He didn't need this. He didn't need the garage, Boston City Hospital, or Linda Metzger. One day a week he left his lucrative private practice and performed his obligatory act of social service. Eduardo leaned his head against the steering wheel and saw Linda's face, distorted with hate and now, in retrospect, a bleak despair.

He heard the rustle of butterfly's wings. *Find her.*

"Of course," he said savagely. "I don't even get the ghosts of my family; just a pile of pretty bugs."

There was no response. He squealed the tires as he drove out into the brittle rain.

Where should he look? he wondered. As if the whole city wasn't a possibility. He didn't know. All he could think of was the collec-

tion of porn parlors and peep shows known as the Combat Zone.

"This is crazy," he muttered. A winking, neon eye flickered at him from the marquee of EyeWitness, a woman's silhouetted torso licked the letters. In the window of a shop named Sensual Appliances was an advertisement for "Hot Underware—Makes Software Harder." There were anonymous shadow-faced men leaning against the wall, smoking, sunken in their jackets away from the rain.

"Christ," he tried to see through the steam on his windshield.

She was leaning against the lamppost, drinking from a long, green bottle, held it high in the air and brought it down, smashing it against the pavement. She waved to the car ahead of him.

"Hey buddy! Get a little pregnant action? I could rub my belly against you nice and slow—it'll be the best *you've* ever had. Hey, baby, come on, now. Come on with your loving mama. I'll make you wish it was yours—"

The light turned green and the car sped through the intersection. Linda stumbled and started to laugh, choked and leaned against the lamppost, coughing.

She saw Eduardo's car and staggered toward him, mouth agape in a malicious grin.

Eduardo opened the door.

She leaned inside, her belly resting against the seat. The smell of the wine struck him, and she had the reek of bile about her. "Nice car, mister. Bet you got a nice—" She saw him.

"Get in." Eduardo clenched the wheel tightly. He wanted to cry. He wanted to hit her. Most of all, he wanted to leave.

"You son-of—"

"*Puta!* Get in the car! Or I leave you here to die like a dog in the rain. You think you will live through the night? You think someone is not going to cut your face off? Here? Get in the car!"

"Nobody's gonna hurt me," she said sullenly as she got inside. "I been here before."

"So what? You think you live some kind of charmed life, eh? Drinking like that. Good Christ! Just because the baby's dead you suddenly think you're not pregnant anymore?"

She didn't answer.

When they left the Zone behind them, Eduardo felt as if he could breathe again.

"Where are we going? You better be worth something 'cause I ain't cheap."

"I don't know."

"You don't know? You're simple. What, you can't figure out where to park? You don't even have to stop the car—"

"Shut up!"

"OK, OK. Just trying to be sociable." She grinned at him again. "Got anything to drink?"

He glared at her and she settled back in her seat. "Suit yourself."

"Uh, oh," she said a few minutes later and then vomited onto the floor. He rolled down the electric windows as they drove across the Charles Street Bridge. "Outside," he roared. "Put your head outside."

She barely got her head out the window before she puked again.

He pulled over to the side of the bridge in the wind, held her head outside as she threw up. Then, tried ineffectually to wipe off the seat. "Can't you even be sick right? In my car? What the *chingado* hell am I doing here? What? Eh?"

"Then leave me the fuck alone!" she shouted at him.

He took her by the shoulder and turned her face to him. "I'm your doctor. For some unknown reason, I'm supposed to help you. Are you done now? Good, for Christ's sake. Get back in the car."

They drove in silence. It was cold in the car even with the heat on, but the smell was so strong he didn't want to close the windows.

"If that's what labor's like," she said at last, "I'm a dead woman." She sounded tired but more or less sober.

He laughed shortly as he turned on Cambridge Street and drove toward Arlington.

"Where the hell are you taking me?" Her voice was low and angry.

"I'm taking you home. My home. To stay with my wife and I until you deliver or until your 38th week—whichever comes first. I can induce by then." He didn't look at her.

"You dirty old bastard! What if I don't want to go?"

Eduardo pulled the car to the curb immediately, got out and walked around to her side, opened the door. "You have a better place to go? The Pine Street Inn, maybe? They're full. The Cambridge Shelter? They're full. Pick some place and I'll take you there. Get out here if you want to."

She stared at him, then relaxed and shrugged. "It's not like I've had any better offers."

He closed the door and resumed driving.

Down Cambridge Street, right at Massachusetts Avenue.

"You got any kids?" He didn't answer. She punched his arm. "Yeah, I'm talking to you."

"No."

"How come?"

He looked at her, then back at the road. "I don't want any."

"What's your wife say?"

"None of your business."

"She's not happy about it, is she?"

He didn't answer.

"Well, she's not going to be happy with this, either. You can bet on that." She nodded to herself with satisfaction. "Why the hell are you doing this?"

Eduardo shook his head slowly. "Damned if I know."

He listened for butterfly wings, but all he could hear was the rain.

Moira's voice was low and menacing: "It's my home, too, Eddie. You had no right—no right!—to bring her here without talking to me first."

Linda was sleeping in the guest room. Eduardo sat on the sofa, leaning forward, his elbows on his thighs, hands rubbing his head. "I know."

"Take her out of here."

"I can't do that."

"What is this? You want a divorce and haven't got the guts to ask me? Is that it? You have to bring this whore home? Do you want me to just leave?" She leaned forward over the coffee table and brought her face next to his. "That's low, Eddie. Really low."

He looked up at her. "I don't want that and you know it."

"Then, start explaining it to me." She sat down across from him and stared at him.

Eduardo shook his head. He stood up and stared out the window at the other houses, windows on people just like him and Moira. Across the street there was a BMW parked in the driveway. In the house next door, there was a new Porsche. The lawns were manicured and laid out as straightforward as a board game.

"I was 10 when he came to me," Eduardo said softly, watching the rain fall on the carefully restored houses.

"Who?"

"The Butterfly Man."

He heard her stand up and make herself a drink. "What are you talking about," she said after a moment.

"They burned the forest down around us," he said. "Poisoned it. Cut it down. Acres at a time. My father and my older brother and my grandfather sat down under the trees. They said, what the hell, they were going to die anyway. So, they decided to steal some dynamite and blow up one of the tanks in Coca. I was ready to go with them. But the Butterfly Man came to me that night and led me into what little was left of the jungle. They never even made it into Coca—they wrecked the boat against the dock and blew themselves to pieces."

Moira came up behind him and touched him on the shoulder.

"You never said how they died—"

"There is more." He continued to stare out the window. "The Butterfly Man said, 'Go into Misahuali to such and such an address and wait for such and such a man. Then, go with him.' I didn't want to go—I barely knew Spanish, much less English. All I knew was the jungle. But I went and I waited. Frank and Jenny Steinmetz found me and they took me home to New Mexico. But they did not believe me when I told them about the Butterfly Man."

"Eddie, what are you talking about?"

Eduardo shook his head. "There is yet more. I was 10 when I reached New Mexico. The Butterfly Man spoke and I ran away from Frank and Jenny. What else should I have done? He had brought me out of the jungle, after all. Later I apologized for this. The Butterfly Man led me to speak with Jerry-Jeff White—Joe's father, a Hopi on the reservation there. Jerry-Jeff believed me and returned me home. I spent a lot of time with him over the years."

Moira turned him around. "Maybe you could see—"

"It's not like seeing or hearing or using some stethoscope. It's different." Eduardo watched the rain make a halo of the streetlight. The light seemed the only thing real outside.

"What's not like—"

"I walk in to look at a patient." He turned to her. "And I can feel the fetus in my mind—I can almost see it, as if someone had peeled away the flesh and there was only this little collection of cells. I can see the mother, where she's been, what she's been doing. Half the time I know what needs to be done before the exam. Other times I know right away how little I can do."

"Jesus," muttered Moira. "Look, Eddie, this is crazy. You're a good doctor—Joe says he's never seen anybody to compare with you. But there aren't any miracles. You can't spread the bones around or look at entrails and see answers." She spoke softly. "Come on. You've been working awfully hard. City Hospital would wear down a saint. Maybe we should just go get a good night's sleep—"

Eduardo shook his head and smiled sadly. "You don't believe me, either. I can do this. It is not a little talent like playing the piano or whistling a tune. The Butterfly Man came to me and showed me how to see them. Once their brains have grown and their minds catch, the flames ignite. When I see their mothers again, their little minds burn, Moira! Like tiny sparks of divine fire. I see everything else by the light of that fire."

"Fire."

Eduardo shrugged. "It is a word. It only describes it. I hear music. I feel heartbeats. I see fire." Eduardo shook his head.

"What's this got to do with our house guest?"

"I don't know. The Butterfly Man brought her to me." He looked at her. "Have a little pity, Moira. She's going to carry a dead child inside for another few weeks. Why not let her stay here?"

Moira stared at him, lips thin, eyes narrow. She walked over to the chair and reached into her purse and pulled put a thin plastic case. She held it up to him. "Know what these are?"

"Moira—"

"I'll tell you: These are birth control pills. As nasty a means as there is of preventing a pregnancy. What question should you ask, Eduardo?" She shook the case at him.

He didn't know what to do. "What's this got to do with Linda?"

"That's the right question." She opened the case and pulled out the circlet of pills. "How long have I wanted a child, Eduardo? How long have I been asking you—my husband—to have that child with me? How long Eduardo? And you have the gall to bring home that woman!"

"Moira," shouted Eduardo. "The baby's dead!"

"I know," said Moira in a calm voice. "She can, of course, stay here. You were right to bring her here."

"Good—"

"You were right because I know I cannot—I *will* not wait any longer. I owe her for that. I will have a baby, Eduardo, with you or without you. I want you to be the father. I want to have a child with you. But if you won't do it, I'll get what I need from one of the sperm banks in town and raise it alone."

She threw the pills in the trash can and turned, walked up the stairs with her back straight. He heard the door shut upstairs.

Why couldn't I see this coming? he thought. "What the hell good is this if I can't see what's coming?" he shouted at the Butterfly Man. There was no answer.

"The Butterfly Man came to me and showed me how to see them. Once their brains have grown and their minds catch, the flames ignite."

Eduardo sat down slowly. Men who have been shot feel this way, he thought, waiting for the blood from the wound, waiting to see if they've been killed. He wondered if his father, his brother, or his grandfather had felt this way when they felt the boat strike the dock, waiting the long moment before the explosion.

THE DAY IN THE LIFE:

His office opened at 9 o'clock; he started seeing patients at 10.

After sleeping downstairs on the sofa, he'd found himself awake, staring at the ceiling, at six in the morning. Soon, that palled and he rose and made himself coffee. He sat at the kitchen table, listening to the news on the radio, not listening to the news on the radio. The morning seemed sweet at that moment, a quiet between storms.

Linda stood in the doorway, yawning. "Do I smell coffee? Is there some food attached to it?"

Eduardo felt another storm closing in.

As Linda ate, she tried to fit her swollen belly under the kitchen table but was not able to. She caught his eye and giggled. After some sleep, she seemed very young.

He sat across from her and watched, absorbed in the way she concentrated on the pancakes and syrup he'd made her and how she downed three glasses of milk, one after another.

Finally, she leaned back and sighed contentedly. "This is the way to live. You're a hell of a host, Eddie."

Eduardo nodded and sipped his coffee. Gradually, her young face changed, bit by bit, replaced by one harder, tougher, less vulnerable. It was like watching the fossilization of some soft animal into rock.

"I heard you and your wife yelling last night," Linda said diffidently.

Eduardo shrugged. "It is as you said: She didn't like it."

"I stood out in the hall and listened. After a while, Moira—she said to call her that, so what the hell, right?" Linda laughed, a hard brittle sound. "Moira came up and talked with me. She asked me a whole lot of questions you didn't: How did I get pregnant? What had I expected to do with … Shawn? Did I run away? Where were my folks—you never asked me any of that."

"You and I have," he said slowly, "a special relationship."

She laughed again. "I guess you're right about that. She reminded me of those Johns that come around and want to talk to you—like they're doing you a favor talking instead of fucking. They always want you to be either all broke up about it, some tragic mistake in your life, or you really deep down inside like it." Linda leaned forward toward him. "It was tough being a whore. You feel bad about it sometimes; sometimes you kind of like it. It's still a lousy job. But, you know, Eddie? Most of the time it was just a job. Guys want you to act like you're having a good time, and so you got to act a little. It doesn't take much to convince them. I never mattered much to the guy I was doing; and he didn't mean anything to me. It was just business." She leaned back and nodded. "Just business. I've sucked cock and I've fried burgers and sucking cock pays better."

"Where did the money go?" Eduardo traced the wood grain of the table with his finger.

She snorted. "Mostly up my arm. At least I'm shut of that."

He considered that, letting the words play in his mind. He rose. "I'm going to take a shower and go into the office later. Try not to make much noise—Moira has surgery this morning and she needs the sleep." Eduardo stopped at the foot of the stairs. "Where do you come from? Where are your parents? How did all this happen to you?"

Linda smiled at him cynically. "Somewhere else. Oh, hell, Eddie, I'm just one of those abused kids that run away from home, too mixed up to know how to take care of their lives, that just gradually drift into drugs and fast cars. You know the type."

"Right." He nodded to himself. "Right." He went up the stairs.

"Have a nice day," she called after him.

His Belmont office was dark; the brick building threw a jet shadow over the parking lot as impenetrable as if it had been thrown on the moon. In the rain, the streetlight limned the building with a silver corona.

Inside, the office was hushed. He sat at his desk and looked around the room, unwilling to work just yet.

It was a bare room, with only a few items of any personal interest: his diplomas, a picture of Moira and Eduardo dancing on their anniversary a few years ago, a piece of sandstone from the reservation in New Mexico. There was nothing from the jungle here, he realized suddenly. It was as if his life had begun when he'd left Ecuador. He didn't know what it was he might have kept, but he felt obscurely he should have kept something.

Eduardo sighed, then stopped—the sound was unnaturally loud in his office. He turned on the computer terminal and began looking through the records of that morning's patients.

The jungle was blasted here. In a kind of twilight, as far as the eye could see, there were the remnants of fires, relics of plowed and abandoned furrows, the burnt remains of oil derricks. Eduardo turned slowly around. All was ruined and destroyed. Although there were no bodies to be seen, he could smell carrion and putrefaction.

"You know better," rasped a voice next to him.

The Butterfly Man pointed out across the broken field. "The forest still lives here. It is healing slowly, now. You know that. Even the land, even the jungle, can heal. You choose not to see that."

Away from the light, beyond where he could see clearly, there were several wavering candlelights floating in the air. They came closer and he could recognize them, though he'd never seen them this way before. They were the children of his patients. The daughter of Ina May Ng came near him. He remembered the day in his office when he tried so hard to pronounce Ina's name correctly, each failure making them laugh, until the tears were streaming down her face and she had to suddenly dash for the bathroom. He reached for the child and it became mottled and dark, monstrous and dying. Eduardo jerked his hand away and it faded and disappeared. The son of Julie May Pedersen danced, a healthy and bright fire. He touched it and it collapsed on itself and died, leaving a sick and twisted, broken body.

"Stop it," cried the Butterfly Man and tried to hold him back. "This is not good. This is not real."

Eduardo shrugged off his grasp and reached for another, Copati Zimonez, from the mountains of Chile—they could almost speak together in their own, childhood tongue, but the language was a shade too different. Her child didn't die when he touched it, but lost its legs and an eye.

"None of you can be for me," Eduardo cried out. "None of you. I won't let you."

"Doctor Steinmetz?"

Eduardo sat up suddenly and shook his head, his eyesight blurry. It was David, his secretary.

"Doctor? Are you OK?"

"Yes." He shook his head vigorously, rubbed his face with his hands. "I came in early—I couldn't sleep." He chuckled. "I couldn't sleep at home, that is. Go on and start getting things ready. Anybody outside?"

David nodded. "Just Ina Ng. She's early, like always."

Ina Ng? He looked at the terminal. Julie Pedersen and Copati Zimonez were this afternoon. Eduardo felt a cold dread congeal inside of him. Had he done something to their children? Something terrible?

"Send her in now."

He felt her on the other side of the door before she came in, felt the strength of the child, the life of it, shining like a strong light. He met her as she came through the door. It must have been a dream, he thought with relief. Just a bad dream.

But why such a dream? When had the Butterfly Man ever sent him a dream? He put the questions out of his mind for the moment. He

"The forest still lives here. It is healing slowly, now. You know that. Even the land, even the jungle, can heal. You choose not to see that."

had patients to see.

"Ina," he said quietly. "You're the best news I've had all day."

Later in the afternoon he revisited the question. The Butterfly Man had been trying to stop the dream. He had said the dream was not real. The dream, then, had come from Eduardo himself and not the Butterfly Man at all. Eduardo rubbed his face with his hands. Was he frightened of children? Of what could happen to them in the womb? Or did he in fact want children after all?

Moira called.

"Hi," he said cautiously.

"Hi, yourself." She sounded sad. "I just wanted to hear your voice for a second. How's your day?"

"Nothing unusual. Most of them were regular exams. I had a couple of referrals. One woman wanted me to terminate the pregnancy. I refused."

"How come? Complications?"

He was silent a moment. "It was like I said last night. Once they've woken up—well, I just can't do it."

She seemed to mull that over. "You can actually see them?"

"Not exactly see—"

"I know, I know. But you know when they—they're not a fetus any longer."

"Yes."

Silence stretched between them.

"What do you think she'll do?" Moira said finally. "After the baby's born?"

"I don't know. Find someone else, I suppose. Try again, maybe. Go back to hooking. I really have no idea." He paused. "How did surgery go?"

"Cut and dried, so to speak." She laughed shortly into the phone. "Nothing unusual."

They fell silent with one another, each knowing the other so well that now, with lines drawn between them, they had nothing to say. It was enough for each to hold the phone and listen to the other breathing.

"I have to go," said Eduardo at last. "I've still got patients."

"I'll see you tonight."

Eduardo hung up the phone and stood resting his hand on the handset, suddenly feeling as rudderless and lost as a broken boat in a high wind.

They retained an uneasy peace for the next week or so. Linda was there for breakfast and waved good-bye to them when they left. She was there when they returned. Eduardo didn't know what she did between those times and was afraid to ask. The equilibrium between the three of them seemed too precarious. They did not speak much in the evenings when the three of them were together. In his mind, Eduardo called out for the Butterfly Man to come and explain what he was supposed to be doing. There was no answer.

Sometimes, they watched a video. Other times, Moira or Eduardo read a book, and the other talked with Linda—the structure of the situation seemed to preclude the three of them conversing together. That seemed too dangerous, too uncontrolled. Some nights, when both Eduardo and Moira were reading or cleaning or involved in some other activity, Linda sat in the kitchen, drinking tea—it turned out that she had developed a great taste for tea when fighting her addiction—watching the street, the other houses, and the sky. On nights when all three of them found themselves unable to face another book, and when the outside window had become unbearable, they went out. To a film. To a play. To some event that did not require conversation.

During this time, Eduardo kept remembering a photograph he'd seen when he was in high school. It had been in a book about tornadoes, showing the houses exploded, the trains and automobiles thrown as if they were the toys of children and, of course, the obligatory picture of a single broom straw protruding from the trunk of a tree. He couldn't remember what he'd been thinking when he'd read that book, seen that picture, and the lack of memory bothered him obscurely. It did not bother him very much, just enough to bring it to mind a little each day. A week after he'd brought Linda home, he remembered. He had wondered how the tree, strong in the midst of a field of wheat that turned brown and died at the end of each summer, had felt when that weak bit of straw had been driven deep into its wooden heart.

Linda's 36th week passed and she, Moira, and Eduardo together began her 37th.

One more week, he thought. Then, I'll induce labor. No one in the world could fault me after that.

Linda came down to breakfast with a clipping in her hand. "I'd like to go to this. Maybe we can all go."

Moira looked up at her over the rim of her coffee mug, then at Eduardo, then back out the window.

Eduardo read the clipping. It was an advertisement for the Ringling Brothers Circus, a tour to include Boston.

"It's here all this week." Linda looked at them both, then down at her hands on her belly. "I'd like to go."

"I've never been to a circus," said Eduardo, idly.

"Me, neither." Linda nodded.

Moira put her coffee cup down. "I don't think it's a good idea."

"Why not?" Eduardo read the clipping again. "It doesn't look particularly harmful."

Linda sat down next to Moira. "It's because of this, right?" She pointed to her belly. "Because she's—it's—dead, right?"

Moira traced the rim of the coffee mug with her finger. "All the children there, Linda. All of them …"

"Alive," Linda finished for her. "Well, I'm a kid, too. I'm only—well, not very old. It's dead and I'm alive. I've never been to a circus. I'll be just fine." She looked at both of them. "Let's all go. You guys can pretend I'm your daughter or something."

Eduardo purchased balcony tickets and for a brief moment, sitting in the Garden, watching the gymnasts and the animals, he did feel as if Linda were his daughter. Linda and Moira—and to be honest, Eduardo himself—watched the trapeze artists seem to dance in the air, winced when the stench of the animals struck them. During a routine where the clowns walked below them through the first rows, juggling scarves and giving them to children, he saw tears on Linda's face. He turned to Moira and saw she was looking away with an expression of bleak despair.

That night, Linda went to her room as soon as they returned. Moira followed Eduardo into the living room.

"Eddie, we've got to talk."

"You want to know if we're going to have a baby together, or if you have to go out on your own."

Moira sat down. "Yes."

"I have never wanted children. I've made no secret of it," Eduardo said mildly. "You've given me an ultimatum. I don't like that very much. Do you want me to give you an answer right now?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm not going to. I want to think about it some more."

"Eddie—" she began, and then stopped.

Look at her, came a voice.

He waved it away with his hand, annoyed that the Butterfly Man was trying to speak to him now. "I am looking at her," he said too softly for Moira to hear him.

Look at her, said the Butterfly Man.

"Eddie," she began again. "I have to know soon."

For a moment, she seemed outlined in a golden shadow. Then, she lost form and was a moving water, whirlpooling about a center. No—the center of the water was a pivot moving the sparkling water around it.

"You're pregnant already," he said suddenly and her face and body came back, suddenly, completely there, cut away from the sofa, the wall behind her, and the rest of the world as if she were a framed figure etched out of stone. "You quit taking those pills weeks ago."

"I wanted—if I was going to get pregnant …" She shook her head. "I didn't want to take any chances. I thought the effect would last a little longer. It usually does—"

"Sixty percent of the time? Seventy?" Eduardo was furious. "You didn't even ask me about it—"

"I've been asking you for years!" Moira bit her knuckle. "I want a good baby. I don't want—"

"One without a brain," said Linda from the foot of the stairs.

They were silent as she came in the room. "You need to learn to fight without making a noise. That's what my parents did." She looked at Eduardo and then at Moira. "What are you worried about? Eddie, here, will take care of you. He'll doctor you and if there's anything wrong with the baby, say if it's left handed, or has a crooked nose, or doesn't have a *head*, you can try again. You'll do that, won't you, Eddie? Hell, Moira, you've got plenty of chances." Linda pointed out the window. "You make me sick. I've been watching you and all your neighborhood friends for weeks. All of them with their nice cars and perfect lawns. Safe. Safe as houses, all of them."

Linda laughed at that. "Safe as houses. Eddie is scared of a little baby. Moira's scared of having one without him. And me," she grinned hard at them. "Me, I'm scared this is my last chance. I don't have any family. I don't have any money. I got this far and my baby's one of the living dead. I can feel it inside me every day. The way it pulls. The way it kicks. The way it turns around. I forget it's dead. I forget and I think about little Shawn, alive, playing, going to the circus, for Christ's sake." Tears began to fall down her face. "I'm scared I won't have the guts to try again. That I'll let it all fall apart again." She stopped, wiped her eyes. Eduardo handed her a tissue and she blew her nose loudly. "I hate crying." She looked at both of them, one after the other. "I'm going back to bed. If you're going to fight about something and keep me up, fight about something real. Fight about being afraid or living and dying. Or loving."

"That is," she said as she was going back up the stairs, "if you have anything real to fight about."

Eduardo couldn't look at Moira for a long moment after that. When he looked up, she was gone.

Linda didn't wait until the 38th week.

Two days after the circus, she called him at the office.

"If you're going to make an honest woman of me," she said, "this is your last chance."

"What's happening?"

He heard her snort over the phone. "I'm lost in the joy of being a mother. Come on, Eddie. The dam broke half an hour ago. No contractions yet."

"Why did you wait to call me?"

She chuckled. "I knew you'd ask me about contractions and I waited to see if there were any."

"I'll be right over."

"You do that. Be the first pickup I've had in a long time."

Eduardo took a moment to call Moira at Boston City Hospital to tell her what was happening. She was in surgery and he left a message with the operating room secretary. Then, he called the Newton-Wellesley Hospital, canceled his appointments, and left.

"Any hospital outside of Boston," she'd said in the first week after he'd brought her home. "I hate the place."

Linda had no contractions in the car or in the hospital as she waited to be admitted. Eduardo could see she was uncomfortable. She looked up at him wanly. "I don't feel so good."

"It's going to get much harder than this, I'm afraid," he said as he wheeled her into her room.

"The story of my life."

She lay down on the bed and looked up at him. "I'm ready now. Why wait?"

"Absolutely no reason. I'll be back in 10 minutes."

He made sure they had the birthing room, then checked to make sure everything was ready. It was, of course. He'd delivered babies here for years.

She was staring at the wall and crying when he returned.

He picked her up and she held on to him, sobbing. After a time, she quieted and pushed him away. He sat in the chair across from her.

"Shawn is really dead, right?" Her eyes bored into him.

"Yes."

"You knew it from the very beginning, right? Without the tests?"

He looked at her. "Yes."

"I knew it." She looked outside the window a moment, turned back to him. "How?"

"It's a special sense I have. Like seeing or hearing."

"Like seeing or hearing," she repeated softly. "Would you check again?"

"Perhaps we could do another ultrasound—"

"Would it say anything different?"

"No."

"Then, you check," she said suddenly fiercely. "Tell me again."

Eduardo took a deep breath. He had no inclination to see the Butterfly Man. "Of course."

"I have to make sure," she said. "I have to know."

With a sense of ritual, he placed his stethoscope on her belly, closed his eyes.

There was no pool, no jungle. The Butterfly Man did not intrude into the darkness. There was only the light that was Linda and the pitiful emptiness of the baby. Eduardo cried out silently, at that moment, for a gift. He wanted to reach out and light a spark in the child, to bring it a mind. To give it life and breath.

"This cannot be made right," said the Butterfly Man, suddenly beside him. "It can only be lived through."

He opened his eyes and saw Linda looking at him with hope. Eduardo shook his head.

"If I could do anything—anything, Linda—to make this baby live," he said shakily, "I'd do it. But I can't."

He could see her give up the last shred of hope.

"Yeah," she said, then inhaled a long breath. "Yeah. I thought so. I had to know, Eddie. Eddie—"

"Yes."

"You won't let me die, will you?" She rubbed her hands over her belly as if making sure it was real. "Even if I want to? It'd be a hell of a thing to die after all of this."

He looked at her hands and her face. "I won't let you die. I promise."

It was a long and hard birth—Linda's body was only now discovering what Linda's mind had learned weeks before and it was trying to correct its mistake. When it was done, Eduardo held a four-pound bit of flesh in his hands.

The nurses took Linda back to her room and Eduardo took Shawn—he could not shake himself of the habit of thinking of it by that name—back to the ready area adjacent to the birthing room.

He set it down on the counter next to the sink.

Shawn's body was breathing, trying to live.

It had a ridiculously small head, so small nothing resembling a brain could possibly be contained there. The face was incongruously large, spread to fit across the misshapen skull. It breathed in, its tiny

chest convulsed by effort, then it relaxed as the breath eased out. The hands and feet were vaguely deformed and the back twisted to one side and back again as if Shawn had tried, in however a misguided fashion, to make up for in the spine what was missing in the skull.

Moreover, it felt dead in his hands. He could feel no spark from it, smell no life in it, see no fire. The warmth in his hands, the sound of its breathing, was a lie, an accident of flesh.

He wanted someone to come in and take it from him, Moira perhaps, and place it in the incubator and wait the hours, days, or weeks until it died. A sudden vision came to him if it lived, lying curled in a bed, never knowing when it was fed, unable to think, unable to feel, insensate even to the heat of the sun on its body, Linda sitting next to this illusion of a child.

He stared at it, a dark weight of dread inside him. This was what he was afraid of—pared away from the ego, the lack of time, and the fears of his own childhood—this broken-backed attempt at a human being. He'd never been willing to take the risk. Linda, a child herself, had risked far more.

No one came.

Eduardo did what needed to be done. He wrapped the baby carefully in a towel and laid it on a high shelf. Then, he left. He would return in six or seven hours and Shawn would be truly and inarguably dead.

He found Moira comforting Linda when he entered the room. They stopped talking and separated, still holding hands, and looked at him.

"Was it alive?" Linda asked, her face a pale mask.

"No," lied Eduardo. "That's why labor started early."

"I figured," she said. "I'd like to leave now."

Eduardo shook his head. "Let's give it a night. We'll take you home tomorrow. There's an extra bed and I can get a cot. We can stay with you."

Linda nodded. He could see the white of her knuckles as she held Moira's hand. She looked first at Moira, then at Eduardo.

"OK," she said. "I'd like that."

They took her home and nursed her through the next month. A failed pregnancy takes as much effort as a successful one—more, actually, because a successful pregnancy ends with a baby. She spent the month in a grieving fog. Gradually, over time, she seemed to come into focus.

Linda was drinking tea and watching the neighborhood when he came in.

"Hey, Eddie," she said softly. She smiled at him. A soft, genuine smile.

"Hello." He sat down across from her. "I have a proposition for you. I don't know what you want to do now, but you can stay here for as long as you want. If you need a job, I can get you one. If you want to do something else, I can help with that, too."

"Thanks, Eddie." She looked back out the window. "I mean that. Thanks a lot."

Silence fell between them. Eduardo leaned back and looked out the window with her.

"I don't know what I'm going to do," she said, and then turned back toward him. She grinned and he saw the toughness of her, strong like a forest, on her face. "Except for one thing. I'm going to try again."

"Good."

Linda was gone before the week was through. Eduardo found some money missing from his wallet. He'd been keeping a few thousand dollars in it for some weeks now on a hunch. Next to the money had been a note: "Take it." She had carefully left him 20 dollars.

Go, Linda, he thought as he looked at the wallet in his hand. He stared out the window into the unexpected September heat. *Go and come back.* He knew she would come back. He knew it as strongly as he'd known about the baby. He had helped but Linda had essentially changed her life by herself, first for Shawn and then, again, after the poor dead baby had been delivered. Life renews itself, he thought. Maybe.

This was what he was afraid of—pared away from the ego, the lack of time, and the fears of his own childhood—this broken-backed attempt at a human being.

Eduardo told Moira when she got home. She nodded and looked at him for a long time.

Life renews itself. Linda was stronger than he was. If she could find a clear way out of her life then maybe Eduardo could struggle out of the shadows he had created for himself. It was worth a try.

Eduardo nodded and pulled the sheets and blankets off the couch in the living room and, together, they walked upstairs.

Something woke Eduardo and he groped out blindly, not knowing where he was. He found Moira and still lost in sleep didn't know her immediately. Then his hand traced the roundness of her belly and he realized he was sleeping next to his own wife, in his own bed, in his own home. Outside, he could see snow falling and he absently watched it fall as his mind struggled awake.

Something had awoken him.

He lay there listening to the noises of the house, Moira's breathing, his own heartbeat, as sleep left him. Linda was near. Coming home? Not yet, he thought, tasting the feeling. But soon. He smiled. Moira would like that. He half thought about waking her and telling her but didn't, letting her sleep. Sleep had come dearly to her in the last month or so.

Look at her.

Deep inside her, Eduardo could see the ebb and flow of the fetus, swimming in a silent, secret sea. A spark lit as he watched. Igniting like fire, the child quickened. The light burned through him and blinded him. He did not know what to feel or how to touch it. After a few moments, he could see again.

It is good, said the Butterfly Man.

"Yes," agreed Eduardo reverently. "It is good."

Eduardo held her, nestled against her, spoon fashion, warmed by the tiny, tiny flame. This was something important. This was something to share. "Wake up," he whispered in her ear.

"What?" mumbled Moira in her sleep.

"Good news," he said softly as she slowly awoke. "Very good news." ❧

The Legend of King Arthur Serves as Mirror and Inspiration to Victorian Society.

BY LAURA CLEVELAND

LEFT: King Arthur *by Charles Ernest Butler, 1903. King Arthur is depicted as a knight in gleaming armor with a heavenly, heroic light shining on him from above.*

ABOVE: Elaine *by Atkinson Grimshaw, 1877. With an almost lifelike dragon leading the way and a Gothic cityscape in the background, Elaine's body is taken to Camelot. The painting was inspired by Tennyson's poem, "Elaine and Lancelot."*

elot Revisited

According to legend, King Arthur was severely wounded at the Battle of Camlann. He was removed from the field by five queens and taken by ship to Avalon to heal. He would wait at Avalon to be recalled when the time was right, when he was needed the most.

Although Arthur's name is mentioned in texts as early as the seventh century, the legend was truly born in the Middle Ages. Geoffrey of Monmouth completed his *History of the Kings of Britain* in 1136. A large portion of the work was devoted to Arthur, and the story was embellished with the characters and weapons that became an essential part of the legend. The *History* was essentially a work of fiction that was interpreted as history by later writers. Later, Henry II commissioned Wace, a cleric at the court, to turn the *History* into a novel, entitled *Roman du Brut*. Wace created further legendary details and invented the Round Table. At the end of the Middle Ages, in 1470, Sir Thomas Mallory completed *Le Morte d'Arthur*, which was Tennyson's source and inspiration for *Idylls of the King*.

Tennyson's Arthur was the symbolic identity of England—an ideal soul.

Arthurian legend was neglected after the Middle Ages but returned again in literature and art during the Victorian period (1831-1901). King Arthur, Queen Guinevere, Sir Lancelot, and other denizens of Camelot inspired many artists and writers, who reinterpreted and transformed the legend to reflect modern society.

Tennyson's *Idylls of the King,* written between 1832 and 1842, was the inspiration for some of the finest paintings and illustrations of the Victorian period. Painters—such as William Holman Hunt, Arthur Burne-Jones, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti—and illustrators such as Arthur Rackham, Aubrey Beardsley, and Florence Harrison, took the subjects of many of their works from *Idylls of the King*. Tennyson gave the legend new life and the power to inspire artists and readers alike to greater aspirations.

When Victoria ascended the throne in 1831, England was entering the Industrial Age, was at the peak of her military power, and was ever expanding her vast empire. It was a time of peace and stability. Tennyson's Arthur was the symbolic identity of England—an ideal soul. Arthur's dream of peace and order and the sacrifices he made to achieve it resonated with a society based on a code of ethics rooted in hierarchy and obedience, privilege and responsibility, generosity and fair play—a modern version of chivalry. The legend reflects the conflict between flesh and high aspirations and Utopia and practical life. Although Arthur's vision ultimately failed, Victorians admired his striving for the perfection of human behavior.

The boundaries between men and women were strictly delineated in Victorian society. Men played an active role and were ruled by the mind and strength. Their domain was the public arena. Arthur was celebrated for his high ideals, noble acts, and heroic spirit. He married a beautiful queen who refused his love and turned to one of his knights, Sir Lancelot. The Knights of the Round Table became corrupted by rivalry, rumor, and suspicion, and Camelot was eventually lost to war. A single sin destroyed an ideal.

FAR LEFT: Four Queens Find Lancelot Sleeping *by Frank Cadogan Cowper. This painting is in the romantic, figurative style of the Pre-Raphaelites. Cowper continued the Victorian painting tradition until 1958.*

CENTER: "So like a shatter'd column lay the king," *by Florence Harrison, for* Tennyson's "Guinevere" and Other Poems, *1912. Photo courtesy of The Newberry Library, Chicago. King Arthur's retreat to Avalon was a favorite subject for Victorian painters, particularly the Pre-Raphaelites. Many Victorian artists, including Aubrey Beardsley and Arthur Rackham, illustrated versions of Mallory's* Morte D'Arthur *and Tennyson's* Idylls of the King.

ABOVE: The Lady of Shalott *by William Holman Hunt. The painting was Hunt's greatest Pre-Raphaelite masterpiece. As she is weaving her tapestry the Lady of Shalott sees Sir Lancelot reflected in a mirror and looks out at the forbidden outside world. Like Elaine and the Lady of Shalott, young Victorian women led sheltered lives and were not allowed to participate in life outside of their homes.*

Lancelot presented quite a dilemma for the moral Victorians. They commended his striving to embody King Arthur's ideal, and he seemed to be an ideal man in every way. But the Victorians believed in the sanctity of home and marriage, so his betrayal of Arthur with Guinevere was condemned. However, it was his sin that was condemned, not the man. Lancelot's behavior toward Elaine inadvertently caused her death, but Elaine herself was at fault. Lancelot was seen as a man involved in an internal battle between his mind and his soul. His sins were paid for with bouts of madness.

Victorian women were ruled by morality instead of passion. Their role was passive and their domain was the home. They were meant to inspire men and to be loving, giving, chaste, and faithful. The sanctity of the home, marriage, and family was their responsibility. If a marriage failed, the woman was blamed and she had no recourse; divorce would ruin her in society. Victorians blamed Guinevere for turning away from Arthur and for setting in motion the downfall of Camelot. Her adultery caused other Knights of the Round Table to doubt their own wives. Geraint, for example, doubted Enid's fidelity and put her through a series of tests that nearly killed her. Guinevere was ruled by the sensual; her battle was between the flesh and the spirit. Eventually, Guinevere saw the error of her ways and lived the rest of her life in service as a nun.

Elaine was well versed in her responsibilities as a young woman and willingly served her father and brothers. Young Victorian women were meant to live sheltered lives until their fathers chose husbands for them, and Elaine was meant to do the same. The boundaries of her life were extremely narrow. She was also raised without a mother to pass on instruction about a woman's expectations. So Elaine became obsessed with Lancelot and deluded herself that he loved her. Upon finding out that Lancelot had no interest in her, she willed herself to die. Victorians sympathized with Elaine, but considered her story a warning against the dangers of girlish will. Victorian men wanted to rescue her and women wanted to be a mother to her.

ABOVE: "The Arming and Departure of the Knights." The Quest of the Holy Grail, *by Edward Burne-Jones, 1891-1894. This is one of a series of six wool and silk tapestries hung in the dining room at Stanmore Hall. They tell the story of the quest for the Grail from the Grail Maiden's appearance at Camelot to Galahad's finding the vessel. This romanticized vision of beautifully dressed knights and their ladies fed the imaginations of both adults and children of the Victorian era.*

CENTER: Queen Guinevere *by James Archer. Based on another version of the search for the Holy Grail, the painting shows Guinevere watching in sorrow as the ships set sail with many of her friends on board.*

RIGHT: Guinevere and Lancelot *by H.J. Ford, from* The Book of Romance, *1917. What could be more romantic than the proverbial knight in shining armor carrying his lady love away on a white horse?*

King Arthur's last battle and departure for Avalon intrigued Victorian artists, writers, and the public as well. In the early part of the Victorian period, Arthurian legend was romantic and nostalgic and celebrated history. Through its ideals of hierarchy and place in society, it delineated the relationship between a female monarch and her male subjects. The legend mirrored the ethics and gender roles that made England into a major power.

From the end of the Victorian period until after World War I, the popularity of the Arthurian legend began to recede. The world was changing rapidly, and people began to question the worth of the class structure and gender roles, and even the monarchy. The Victorian ideals celebrated in Arthurian legend were no longer considered valid, and the new generation did not wish to live by the rules of earlier generations. Once again, Arthur retreated to Avalon with the hope of returning in the future, when the legend would begin again. ❧

The Slayers

By David Lee Summers • Illustration by Mark Harrison

At 22 years old, I began to grow restless and desired to see the world. What better way, I thought, than from the air, hunting dragons. I made my way to the island of Tuket in the northeast to seek employment on a dirigible.

I arrived at Tuket on a crisp, clear day in early fall. The airfield was breathtaking. Rows of rigid airships stood in columns upon the moors. Their skins were made of the hide of animals and, for the most part, their superstructures were made of wood. One airship stood out from the rest. Its skin was that of at least three red dragons. The captain must be skilled, indeed, I thought. I decided to go aboard and see if they would have me for their crew.

In the gondola, I found a man dressed in black. He stood behind a chart table of mahogany, edged in dragon bone. He eyed me with a curious stare.

"Good day," I said. "I would like to go hunting dragons."

"Indeed," he sneered. "Many would like the money a good dragon hunt would provide. Others would thrill to ride the air currents aboard this ship. What skills have ye?"

"I am a good flyer," I said truthfully, hoping the man would not press for more details.

"You know the currents and can herd the beasts to the harpooneers, eh?"

"I know the air," I said resolutely. In fact the only animals I had ever corralled with a flyer were birds.

The man eyed me, his lips pursed. After a moment, he produced a book. "Make your mark and go up to your berth," he said, inclining his head toward a ladder that led into the belly of the ship. "Ye are now a flyer for the *Slayer*, a proud ship."

"Are ye the captain of the *Slayer*?" I asked as I made my mark in the book.

"No," said the man, sitting back. "I am the owner. You will sail with Captain Obrey. He is a good man, if somewhat driven." With that, the *Slayer*'s owner gave me instructions to my bunk and dismissed me with a nod. Gathering up my few belongings, I made my way timidly up the ladder.

I found the berth the owner spoke of after a relatively easy search. The berth contained two bunks. A rather large man with no hair occupied one of the bunks. His harsh features were illuminated by the light of a dragon-carbide lamp. He worked the tip of a harpoon with a stone. His silence was almost worse than any sound he could have made. After a moment of contemplating the man, I placed my belongings on the other bunk and sat, quietly. He looked up at me, and I think I must have jumped because he smiled with a great deal of mirth. My bunkmate placed the stone and point to his side. "I am Culeg," he said, his voice booming in the small berth. "I come from the islands of the south. You must be my flyer?"

I smiled nervously as the big harpooneer evaluated me carefully. "I am Rado. I am a flyer."

Culeg clapped me on the shoulder. "No dragons." The statement sounded almost like a question, as though he weren't quite sure what to make of me. "No matter," he

The more things change, the more they stay the same. This may be how it all began.

said at last. "My last flyer had no dragons either."

"What happened to him?" I asked.

"Eaten," said the harpooneer, resuming his work with the stone.

"I am a flyer," I said, gaining resolution. He looked at me with an amused smirk and my gaze fell to my feet. "I've never hunted dragons, though."

"Better than the last one, then," said Culeg, his eyes never leaving the harpoon. "He was not even a real flyer. Are you of the west?"

"I am."

"Good, then there is hope that I can teach you to fly well while we are still in the territory of the green dragons."

It was only a few short days before the *Slayer* departed Tuket for the first of the hunting grounds. I watched from the gallery as we lifted off the ground. All of the other dirigibles appeared to grow small, looking almost like insects. There was a rumbling as the topmen scurried around the ship and deployed the wind sails. The salt air blew through my hair and I felt free of the cares of the world.

My sense of freedom was not long-lived, however. The mates soon put me and my fellow flyers to work scrubbing the many decks within the dirigible. They said it was to help us learn discipline and build muscle. The second mate, a boisterous man named Hujo, hounded me constantly, making me clean patches over and over again. I sensed the first mate, Folger, watching me closely. Each night, my muscles ached greatly when I went to bed.

After a week, Folger gathered the flyers and explained the hunt. "We work in fours," stated Folger without prelude. "A mate, two flyers, and a harpooneer. The mate directs the hunt. The flyers corral the dragon and the harpooneer makes the kill." I suspected that many around me knew this simple speech by heart. However, airmen are creatures of habit and are comforted by familiar words. "Are there any questions?"

Before a question could be raised, a thumping sound threw the airmen into silence. "It's the captain," whispered Hujo. Indeed, in the week that I had been aboard *Slayer* I had not seen the captain. A man of great girth, walking on a wooden leg, approached. He had long, flowing, blond hair. His stern expression appeared almost a façade, masking a jovial personality.

Culeg leaned over to me. "On most ships, the captain is a hunt leader. Obrey was too, until he lost his leg to a dragon," said the harpooneer in a whisper.

"Good day, men," said Obrey in a pleasant voice. He produced a map from his jacket that bore the familiar legend, "There be dragons here," in several places. "We will start our hunt over the eastern islands, the hunting grounds of the green dragon. Many of you are new to dragon slaying and I want to give you the opportunity to learn your trade before we move inland to hunt the mighty red dragon. The mates will start drilling you over the open ocean. I expect we will be over the first hunting grounds within two weeks. Your drills will start immediately." With that, the captain rolled up his map and tucked it back into his jacket. With a thumping, he made his way back to the deckhouse.

"You heard the captain," called Folger in a businesslike voice. The first mate assigned us to our teams. I found I was in a hunting party with Folger as well as my bunkmate Culeg. "To your flyers!"

The flyers were glorious relief after toiling for a week on the decks of the dirigible. The first day was little more than undirected flying. Even at that, I felt my stomach drop as I grabbed the bar of the flyer and left the relative safety of the airship. The ocean didn't seem so far below until I realized that the small fish I thought I saw swimming in the ocean was in fact a fishing boat. That night, my arms ached so much that I longed to return to the simple toil of cleaning the decks.

The following weeks were spent developing our coordination as a fighting team. My fellow flyer and I learned to take direction from Folger as we flew tighter and tighter circles. We learned maneuvers that would, hopefully, keep us from the snapping jaws of a dragon. Finally, we learned how to deliver a dragon to the waiting harpoon of Culeg.

Two weeks later, we arrived at the eastern islands. It was still autumn and the weather remained calm. *Slayer* flew over the islands in search of dragons. The captain, Folger, and Hujo seemed to spend countless hours in the deckhouse, watching for prey animals or scorch marks in the island foliage that would indicate that one of the beasts was near.

I was scrubbing a section of deck not far from my berth when I heard a familiar cry from Folger, "To your flyers, men!" This time, though, the cry held a certain urgency that had been missing previous times. Leaving my bucket and sponge behind, I ran for the hatch that led to my flyer. Leaping through the hatch, I grabbed the bar and disengaged the wing. The flyer glided free of the dirigible. I saw Folger in the air ahead of me. Turning my head, I saw Culeg disengage his flyer. Turning my eyes back to Folger, I followed his course. Ahead of us was a figure not unlike a green, gliding bird.

We approached the figure with almost blinding speed. As we approached, the great, leathery wings became distinct. The dragon's serpent-like head was bent forward, its eyes scanning the ground. Presumably it was hunting and had yet to see us. Folger directed my fellow flyer and me to approach the dragon from opposite sides. I lifted the wing to get a better grip on the wind and soared past Foger.

The dragon seemed almost to lackadaisically raise its head. I found myself approaching eyes that were nearly as big as myself. I banked and made a wide arc around the head. As I began my turn, I saw the dragon's wide lips curl away from yellow fangs. Catching my breath, I thought, *don't let the dragon eat me.* At that moment, I realized, I had waited too long to regain control of the flyer. I was careening toward one of the dragon's leathery wings.

As I approached the wing, I felt a rush of air. Then, instead of the wing, I saw the ocean ahead of me. By flapping, the dragon had sent me into a dive. I fought to bring my flyer into control. Hitting the ocean from the height I was at would be just like slamming my flyer into a cliff face. With some work, I finally caught an updraft and soared gently, slowly gaining altitude. My heart pounded furiously as I concentrated on keeping control of my flyer.

After a time, I was finally able to look back up. I saw Folger and my fellow flyer swooping around the dragon. The serpentine neck coiled back and lashed at the flyer. Blinking several times, I realized that he was gone. The dragon had plucked him neatly out of the sky. At first, I couldn't find Culeg's flyer. I then spotted him rising from underneath. Releasing his spear, he swooped neatly out from under the dragon.

The beast let out a burst of flame, narrowly missing Folger, as the harpoon struck home. The dragon crumpled, its legs thrashing at the harpoon in its belly. Realizing where I was, I stopped circling upward and flew straight ahead, out of the path of the falling dragon.

A swarm of flyers descended from the *Slayer.* Each of them fired a spear at the dragon. As the spears took hold, they hefted. Their goal was to keep the dragon from plunging into the ocean. If they slowed its decent enough, the beast would float long enough for *Slayer* to descend and retrieve the carcass.

That evening, I watched the cleaning crew set to work on the dragon. The dragon hung behind the deckhouse swaying underneath the superstructure. The crew carefully extracted the dragon's valuable teeth and claws. Those would be saved and sold to carvers who would make them into jewelry and wall hangings. The belly of the dragon was sliced open. A worker climbed in and shoveled out the valuable fire-producing carbide that would light houses around the world. Culeg stepped up behind me and nodded his approval. "A nice piece of work," he said. "Only one flyer lost."

"One flyer," I snorted. "It could have been me."

"It wasn't," said Culeg, his hand firmly on my shoulder. "This was an easy dragon. You both were sloppy, but you were smart enough to steer clear of the mouth. A fall you can recover from. You will learn. You will have to. The reds keep fighting after they are harpooned."

We watched as a carbide bucket was lifted into the hold. Once the crewmen had climbed the rope ladder to the superstructure, the dragon's carcass, looking very nearly intact, was cut free. I watched as it plummeted to the ocean below.

"What a waste," I said sadly.

"Dragons are pests," said Culeg darkly. "Their teeth bring us riches and their carbide brings us light. The rest, bah." The harpooneer brightened. "Come, there is a celebration in honor of our first kill."

I followed, even though I didn't feel very much like celebrating.

Many celebrations followed that first one. I remember one in particular. The men had all consumed much mead and were boasting. Hujo banged the table with his mug. "Did I ever tell you the story of how Captain Obrey brought down the gold dragon?"

The mention of a gold dragon brought a hush over the crew. "Old Obrey's self-confidence ain't all bluster and gale. I sailed with him that time he got the gold one."

"No one can kill a gold dragon," called out one of the men.

"Obrey did," said Hujo. "He lost his leg and damn near lost his ship in the process."

"Would he do it again?" asked one of the other men.

"A mate would be foolish to take on a gold dragon," said a very drunk crewman.

"We'd be set for life," whooped another crewman.

"Then why ain't Obrey set for life?" asked a harpooneer. "Nor you, Mr. Hujo?"

"The dragon fell into a mountain," said Hujo. "T'weren't much left of it after the hunt was done. It only netted us about the same as an ordinary red. Captain Obrey has always wanted to get another gold since then. He wants it so bad he can taste it."

That night, I lay in my bunk staring at the ceiling thinking about gold dragons. I had seen paintings and heard many stories. The gold dragons were among the biggest living animals and had the biggest brains of any creature. That such an animal could fly was simply breathtaking. "Culeg," I called softly into the darkness.

I heard a grunt from below. Culeg was awake.

"Would Captain Obrey really risk this ship for a gold dragon?"

"Men will risk their lives and more for lesser prizes," said Culeg softly.

"But why?" I gasped. "Is a gold dragon really worth the effort?"

Culeg was silent for a long time. Finally he said, "I do not know that there is much more carbide in a gold than in a red dragon. However there is fame in the capture of a gold. With fame often comes fortune. With one gold, Captain Obrey could own a fleet of airships and never have to fly again."

I bit my lower lip and thought about Culeg's words. "But is that worth a life? Is that worth risking a crew? After all, he did kill a gold."

Culeg snorted. "Indeed, but the dragon was destroyed; worthless. He seeks a kind of revenge."

I rolled over. "Revenge for his lost leg?"

"Revenge because the other dragon dared to die." There came a rustling from Culeg's sheets. I could suddenly see the whites of the harpooneer's eyes looking over the edge of my bunk. "For some men, the only worthwhile prize is the one that can be proven. For some men, that prize is worth everything." I felt Culeg's breath on my neck. "The prize is worth everything," he repeated.

We hunted through the winter and into early spring. After my first fall, Folger had considered making me a sail hand, scurrying along the surface of the ship to alter the sails to affect our course or speed. However, it turned out that I had lucked out by having my comrade eaten. While my competence was minimal, I had survived. That was regarded as a valuable asset. By the spring, I had mastered my flyer and had become quite good at getting the green dragons into range of Culeg's harpoon. We were, at last, approaching the hunting grounds of the red dragon.

Although we had killed many green dragons, their carbide was minimal. They never grew large by dragon standards and so their teeth were small. The real money from a slaying came from the reds.

By this point in the expedition, we were over dry land. We had gone around much of the world and were now over the western deserts, north of my homeland. I was asleep in my bunk when I heard Folger call, "To your flyers, men!"

Culeg shook me awake and I ran for the flyer hatch. "Yow! Our first red!" called my fellow flyer as he leapt through his hatch. I leapt through mine and disengaged the flyer.

I was soaring away from the ship as I realized it was early morning, before sunrise. The sky was lightening, but a few stars were still out. Folger directed our flight using a dragon-carbide lantern. Scanning the horizon, I saw other carbide lanterns in use. Other teams were out. The dragon the spotters had seen must be a big one. It would mean a lot of money for Captain Obrey and his crew.

We seemed to soar for a long time. My arms were growing tired and I watched as the stars vanished. Shortly thereafter, the sun began to peek up over the horizon. I felt a chill run up my spine. Scanning, I saw a golden glint. At first, I thought it was a lake in the mountains. Then I realized the glinting surface was moving. It was the dragon.

As the morning light grew in intensity, I could see that the dragon was not a red as my fellow flyer had called out. This was a gold. I saw all five teams of flyers making their way to the beast.

The gold dragon, seeing the crews swarming toward it, swung around—its mouth open, its fearsome tongue protruding. As we approached, I realized the dragon was almost as big as the *Slayer*. The beast scooped Hujo and his entire team up in its mouth, then turned to my team.

Folger directed us to scatter. All of the flyers began to swarm around the giant gold dragon.

The beast reared up and swirled its wings to hold itself in position. From its stationary vantage, it could strike with its neck and grab flyers out of the air at will. The harpooneers each made passes, unleashing their weapons as they went. Culeg soared up to try to thrust a harpoon into the dragon's eye, in hopes of blinding it. Faster than thought, the dragon struck out and plucked my friend from the air. The other harpooneers were either grabbed from the air or swatted with the creature's enormous tail. I continued to circle, feeling helpless.

Our numbers shrank from 20 flyers to five. The dragon seemed to grow tired of this game. Looking around, it spotted the *Slayer*. The beast hurled itself toward the dirigible, a hundred yards of flame shooting from its gaping jaws.

I looked down just in time to see that my circles were bringing me closer to the ground. I slowed my descent and made a soft landing. Discarding the flyer, I ran for the cover of an outcropping of rocks. I looked up to see the pillar of fire contact the *Slayer*.

The dirigible's sails were engulfed in flame instantly. The four remaining flyers were turning to make their way back to the airship, to do what they could to help. The dragon flew past the *Slayer* then swooped again, more flame issuing from its mouth.

What happened next is hard to tell. My best guess is that the flame from the sails spread inside the ship and contacted the tons of carbide we had collected. There was a great whoosh as a fireball engulfed the *Slayer* and the dragon. The dragon made a hideous screeching noise as it plummeted out of control into the ground. The *Slayer*'s superstructure seemed to crumple in slow motion as it sank to the ground. Once it contacted the ground, it flared up in a second explosion.

I waited nearly a week for the flames to die down enough for me to search for survivors. As far as I can tell, none of the flyers who were still in the air when the dragon and the *Slayer* came down, survived.

My flyer was still in good enough shape for me to use it to get to a settlement. From that settlement, I was able to find passage home. During the trip home, I reflected on all the dragons we'd killed. If we kill off all the dragons, what then? I asked myself. What other majestic beast will have to die so that we can light our homes? What will future generations think of the dragon bones left in the ocean and the sand? I couldn't help but wonder if the oil of the great whales could be used in lamps. ❧

By James Van Pelt
Illustration by David Beck

the stars Underfoot

The song says, "Break on through to the other side." Maybe that's not such a good idea.

In the middle of the night, Dustin edged away from the frozen shore, careful to keep his weight evenly on both feet. The quarter-mile-wide lake had only started freezing a week ago, and no one had made it more than a yard before the ice cracked. Yesterday Kenyon Parker had fallen in up to his knees, and while the gang laughed, he'd run for home, his lips blue with cold. But the temperature had been bitter all day, and once the sun set, the thermometer plunged below zero. I'll be the first across this year, Dustin thought. There's an advantage to being small. He shuffled forward, the ice so thin he could almost feel it sag under his weight.

He stood on a starry table spread beneath

A deep breath froze the inside of his nostrils, and it tickled when he wrinkled his nose. So he did it again. I've already established the season's record. I've got to be 20 feet out, he thought. It was hard to tell by starlight what the distance was, so he flicked his flashlight on to check. Yep, 20 feet if it's an inch. Underneath him, trapped bubbles slid away like little jellyfish. The ice was remarkably clear. Dustin crouched, pressed the light against the ice, and played it across the bottom, across silt-covered sticks and muddy boulders, much deeper than he was tall. He turned the light off. If anyone in the houses surrounding the park saw him, they would call the police for sure. Last year, *days* after Mike Liddle had made the first crossing, Dustin had been walking alone across the lake, and a lady stuck her head out her back door to yell, "Get off the lake, young man. It's not frozen." Dustin looked down at his feet, at the milky smooth expanse as solid as a marble floor. "Call the Pope, then," he'd called back. "It's a miracle," which he'd thought was a pretty clever thing for a 12-year-old to come up with.

Of course, Mike Liddle had been a hero all winter last year, and Kenyon Parker was one for falling in this year, but no one had ever attempted a night crossing to open the season. No one had ever done it alone. Dustin checked under his coat where the camera was protected from the cold. When he reached the middle, he'd take a picture. Ten bucks at the one-hour developing place, and his name would be carved into neighborhood history.

A splash at the lake's far end. Then, quacking, as if the ducks were right beside him. House lights reflected off the unfrozen part of the lake where they swam, looking like little puppet figures, most with their heads down. Overhead, stars glittered with icy twinkles so sharp that Dustin thought he could surely touch them. He shuffled forward, wary of the slickness, farther from shore, closer to the lake's middle. Another quick check through the ice. His flashlight penetrated deeply, but couldn't reach the bottom now. Green particles drifted through the beam. He wiped the light with his sleeve, standing still, listening to the night sounds. A half-hour earlier he'd removed the screen in his bedroom window, lowered himself out, and hiked the mile to the park, crunching through ice-encrusted leaves strewn on pale sidewalks. He'd never walked through the town at night, and now, in the midst of the lake's smooth emptiness, the sounds were amplified: cars shifting gears on streets blocks away, a dog barking, distant laughter from a party. And lights seemed more intense, too. Not just the stars, but windows in the homes whose backyards faced the lake. Some glowed in a flickery blue that said a television was on. Rich yellow light poured from others. The air smelled of woodsmoke. Dustin exhaled carefully because he didn't want to disturb the symphony with his own sounds. His glasses fogged from his breathing, so he turned a little into the breeze, and they cleared. The night had never seemed so pure and clean. If he'd known it would be like this, he would have snuck out every night, and he told himself that in the future he would. I'm a superhero, he thought. I'm outside of space and time. I move where no one sees or hears me, while I see and hear all. He chuckled, and it sounded loud in the brittle cold.

A series of snaps, like tiny firecrackers, radiated away from his feet on the next step. He stopped, hands held from his sides as if he were balancing, and his heart raced. I'm in danger! No one knows I'm out here! He shuffled a few feet farther, away from the weak area, then stood as motionless as a statue, his hands still out. The ice glittered. It was the stars, perfectly reflected. He stood on a starry table spread beneath him, and he thought about astronauts and space walks. Even the quality of air tasted different, more animated, more primordial. He felt like an explorer, in the center of his own town; he'd discovered a new wilderness. "Trailblazer," he said. "Dustin Boone," the crackling ice already forgotten.

Being small bothered him. He'd never been a hero in anything. Even his friends picked him last when they chose sides, like he was the little brother they had *to play with. And the teachers only tolerated him at school, where he earned Cs, because his mom and dad would ground him if he had a D. He read too much and paid attention too little. He'd stare out the window, cheek resting on his hand, where the mountains rose cool and blue on the horizon, and he imagined undiscovered countries. He watched late-night science fiction and horror movies on Friday and Saturday, when his parents let him. Never the hero. Always the dreamer, the reader, the observer.*

A breeze scurried across the surface, kicking the dusting of snow into glowing spirals. Dustin's eyes watered, so he blinked them clear. For a second, he thought a beam of light had flashed up through the ice just in front of him. He blinked again. Nothing other than the little crystal whirlwinds dancing across the lake. He swayed. The stars beneath and above, the wind that switched from front to back, the sense that he wasn't standing on anything substantial, dizzied him. For a second, he was afraid he might fall. Surely that would send him through the ice. He remembered rocks they'd thrown into the lake yesterday, orange-sized stones lobbed high that vanished with ragged claps, leaving uneven holes where the water boiled for a second, then was still. The light appeared again, 20 feet away, a distinct glow below the surface.

He moved toward it, careful to keep his feet always against the ice, his body awash with goosebumps. How could there be a light *under* the water? He looked up. Maybe it was a reflection, a plane, a planet, but only the hard-edged stars filled his vision. Maybe it was a ghost, and that nearly stopped him, but maybe it wasn't. He continued on, eyes so wide that he thought they might freeze that way.

The light changed in intensity, dimming, almost disappearing, then growing strong again. It was a beam now, cutting through the water beneath Dustin, so that for a second he saw the floating algae he'd seen earlier, suspended green specs, then the light pointed away from him. Dustin could see the source, a bright spot three or four feet deep. He held his breath. Could it be a new kind of fish, something that only came out in early winter, never observed before?

Dustin was an imaginative boy. He played by himself in the yard for hours, building kingdoms, then tearing them down. He wrote stories in the back of notebooks, not showing them to anyone. His full life was mostly a secret from his acquaintances. He'd read at family parties, not so much to escape the meaningless chit chat, although that was an advantage, but because he yearned to visit secret worlds. In the books, he saved the day. He solved the problem. He turned the tide. He was not an ordinary boy, because an ordinary boy would not be out on a barely frozen lake in the stars; an ordinary boy would not hope that a picture taken in the middle of the night would make him a hero to his friends.

So he was not ordinary, because an ordinary boy would have run away from the light instead of sliding ever closer, and an ordinary boy would have surely screamed when he saw the light was a flashlight, and holding the flashlight was a hand, and that the hand was attached to an arm wearing a coat somewhat like Dustin's own, and the boy who was wearing the coat stood on the ice just as Dustin did, but upside down, like a bat, walking under the water, pointing his light ahead of him, moving his feet carefully, as if he too might slip and fall.

"Hey!" yelled Dustin. His voice echoed from the nearby houses, and the ducks fluttered in response, swimming to their pool's far side. "How can you do that?"

The boy under the ice paused, then swung his light to and fro, as if he'd heard, but didn't know where the question had come from.

him, and he thought about astronauts and space walks.

Dustin crouched to see better. The soles of the boy's shoes were under Dustin's mittens. Dustin realized the boy didn't look wet. His coat wasn't water sodden, and his hair, from what he could see by the boy's light, was neatly combed. He had a pleasant face, maybe only a year or so older than Dustin, and he wore glasses, but he looked puzzled as he turned slowly, shining his flashlight all around him.

"I'm here," yelled Dustin.

The boy turned his flashlight down. Suddenly Dustin couldn't see. The light blinded him. He threw himself away, slipping on the ice, and there was a sudden cracking. Dustin kept moving, trying to see what was happening. His hands were wet! The ice was broken. He lay flat, spreading his weight, trying to see past the great, black circle that was the flashlight's afterimage.

Something splashed, more ice cracking, and a vague scream. No, not vague, muted, like a scream with the volume turned down, a distant-sounding "Help! Help!" only 10 feet away.

Dustin turned on his flashlight. The boy's legs stuck through the ice and kicked wildly into the air. A movement above him caught Dustin's eye, and he flicked his light toward it. At first, he couldn't tell what it was, then he recognized the boy's flashlight rising from the lake, sinking into the stars. When it turned, its beam glowed dully, then winked out.

Then the ice broke more, and the boy lurched closer into view, his elbows visible now, thrashing at the ice. Dustin glimpsed his face, pulled from the water, and it was frightened, cheeks bulging in a held breath. The boy kicked himself down and tried to pull himself under the surface, but the ice kept breaking. The face appeared. He choked, then lunged down again.

Dustin thought about moving farther away, to keep the cracked ice as far from him as possible. He could retreat to the shore. Whatever was happening here was beyond his ability to understand or explain. Who would believe it? But he didn't move. He watched, his hands bunched into fists so tight he could feel his fingernails digging in, even through the mittens. "Get back!" he yelled. "Get back!" and he didn't mean "Get away," but "Get back to where you are safe."

The boy floated up, until only his hands remained in the water, flailing. Dustin imagined in a moment, the boy's struggles would weaken. He'd go limp and slowly follow his flashlight into the sky.

Knowing that it was stupid, thinking that the boy drowning in air was probably a hallucination, Dustin left his light on the ice pointed toward the boy and pushed his way forward.

Wet ice. Broken ice. He broke through the ice five feet away. Water. Water like liquid fire, soaking through his pants, weighing down his coat, pulling him deep. Dustin kicked himself forward, so shocked by the water's temperature he couldn't inhale. He kicked himself forward, then grabbed the other boy's wrist that was now a foot above the lake. Dustin pulled hard. The boy moved toward the water, while Dustin's sinking stopped. He pulled again. The boy's face was against his own. They'd both lost their glasses, but by the flashlight's pure light he saw the boy's eyes, an inch from his own, and they were pleading. Now the boy's head was under water, while Dustin was clear of the lake to his armpits. He climbed the boy like he would climb a float toy, pulling himself up while pushing the boy down, and the boy helped, thrusting himself deeper. He grabbed Dustin's leg, pinching the skin through his winter pants.

But they weren't stable. Dustin felt the roll begin, and his head was under water, a thousand cold needles piercing his scalp and peeling back the skin. A scramble to get back on top, desperate to be *above* the water. Knees collided. Hands grabbed coats, tugged, struggled, until there was an equilibrium again, Dustin's head high.

For a moment, he didn't think about saving the boy. Anything to get out of the strangling cold. He'd taken two choking gulps in a row. Coughing ripped his throat, and already his arms felt leaden, his hands like wood. His face burned. He climbed the upside-down boy. A promised land of unbroken ice beckoned in front of the flashlight. Dustin reached toward it, careful of their balance, gathered in water, and pushed it behind them. They moved a couple of inches. The boy's legs shook under Dustin's hand, but he reached into the lake too, his hand appearing out of the water, mimicking Dustin's movement, and they moved again. Working together, they paddled toward the unbroken ice.

Even Dustin's brain felt cold and sluggish, his thoughts disconnected. Why can't I keep climbing, he thought, until I'm standing on the bottom of his feet and he's standing on the bottom of mine? We could *walk* out of danger if we always stepped where the other stepped, and the vision seemed so dreamy, for a minute he thought they were already doing it, which frightened him more than anything that had occurred so far because his hand had stopped paddling. He was just holding on, shivering so hard that it was as if his muscles had locked up. He forced himself to paddle again. Every inch in the core of him hurt, but he couldn't feel his arms or feet now at all. He had to watch to be sure they were still moving.

The unbroken edge moved closer. The flashlight was only 10 feet away. He touched the solid surface, slid his hand across it. Nothing to hold onto, and they almost tipped again. He reached, a little farther this time. For an instant, his wet mitten stuck to the ice, pulling the edge against their hips, but the mitten broke loose. The boy's boot shifted under Dustin's armpit. How could they get back onto the ice without shattering it? Dustin shut his eyes tight, his head so cold that his thoughts flowed like thick jelly. He could push away from the boy and fall flat. If the ice held, he'd be safe, but the boy would be in the middle again. Dustin looked down. The boy held his legs in nearly the same manner. It could work if they leaned at the same time. They'd fall to their sides of the ice, their legs still in the water, but maybe they could scoot to safety. Dustin put his hand flat on the surface. The flashlight beam shone directly on it. If the boy looked, he would see it, a mittened silhouette through the ice. Would he understand?

Breathing hurt. Razor-like crystals seemed to cut into his lungs, his throat. The boy moved—the balance shifted—and through the ice, Dustin saw him reach. Their hands faced palm to palm, only an inch apart. Dustin let go of the boy's leg and twisted as he fell, so that he landed on his stomach. A loud snap. Somewhere, the ice cracked, but it held beneath him. He pulled a knee out of the water, slid forward a few inches. Got the other knee out. Slid. He was clear of the hole, five feet from the flashlight. The boy on the other side pushed forward, too.

The light revealed him. Blue eyes to Dustin's brown. Frightened. Hurting, but alive, inhaling. Dustin pushed himself to his hands and knees. If I don't move I'll freeze to death, he thought. He staggered to his feet. Shuffled to the shore, two hundred yards farther, his coat and pants weighing him down, then lumbered toward home as if Jupiter's gravity was holding him down, water turning to ice in his hair.

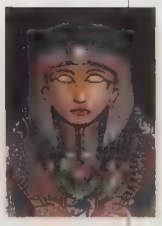
What seemed like hours later, he stood in his shower, still in his clothes, his skin tingling in the heat, his un-numbing fingers and toes screaming. Every muscle complaining, he peeled away the coat, dropped the ruined camera to the tile. I was a hero tonight, he thought as he sat among his lake-soaked clothes, the shower water pounding down, the steam filling the bathroom.

He thought, being a hero isn't about what happened; it's about what didn't. I was a hero tonight, and he was too tired even to cry.

That happened much later that night, and many nights after, when he woke from a dream, where the boy on the other side was dead, his eyes creamy pale and wide, only an inch away beyond the ice, and the boy was him. ❧

By Eric T. Baker

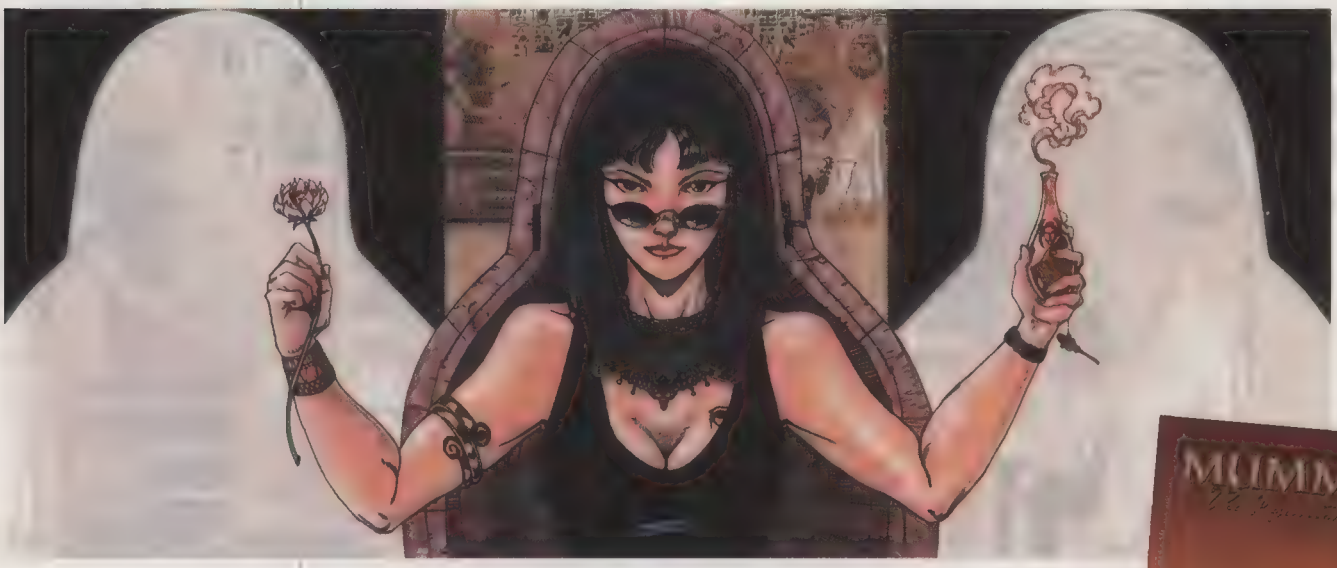
Battling mummies, severed heads, time travel—something for everyone.



It feels odd reading a game about life after death after just returning from a funeral. White Wolf's *Mummy: The Resurrection*, a revised take on this class of the undead, is over 200 pages of cool ideas and neat background, but a reader can be forgiven for hoping that the dearly departed find an afterlife not nearly so turbulent and complex.

This is the Year of the Scarab at White Wolf, which means that the World of Darkness is taking a close look at the Middle East and Islam and Arabia and Egypt. The opening fiction piece of *Mummy* casts the god Osiris against the Dja-akh, the "ghost storm." This opening sets up similarities between *Mummy* and *Wraith: The Oblivion*. Both games deal with characters who have come back to the world of the living because the land of the dead is no longer safe. The Egyptian City of the Dead, Amenti, is in danger of being destroyed, so the spirits who live there are sent into the world of the living, the Skinlands, to find recently dead people whose weaknesses and strengths complement them. If the new soul accepts the marriage offer by the old soul, the two of them are joined, creating an Amenti, one of the Reborn. The mission of the mummies is to fix the ghost storm by battling the forces of entropy and chaos in the living world. Apophis is the name of these forces, and Set is one of his followers. And yes, it is the same Set who has his own clan of vampire followers in the *Vampire: The Masquerade* books.

Speaking of clans, mummies come in one of six flavors: the Kher-Minu (Tombwatchers), Khri-habi (Scroll Bearers), Mesektet (Vessels of Ra or Night Suns), Sakhmu (Spirit Scepters), Sefehi (Unbandaged Ones), and the Udja-sen (Judged Ones). Egyptian mythology holds that there are six parts of the soul, and so a new mummy's clan is determined by which part of an old soul finds the new soul and is accepted by it. After the acceptance, the older spirit cuts away as many of the flaws as it can from the younger soul. From a mechanics point of view, what this means is that mummies end up with fewer flaws than most World of Darkness characters, but the ones they do end up with tend to be whoppers. The finished character is immortal, but its mortal body can still be slain. If this happens, the Amenti travels to the Shadowlands and has to wait there until it can gather enough Sekhem (force of spirit) to cross the Shroud, the line between life and death, to return to its body.



Egyptian mythology, strange magic, and clans of fighting mummies add to the enjoyment of playing this World of Darkness variation.

Each mummy clan holds an affinity for a certain type of Hekau, the magic of the Amenti. The types are Amulets, Alchemy, Celestial, Effigy, Necromancy, or *any* (exclusive to Udja-sen). As in other White Wolf game lines, Hekau is learned in paths, but the powers present a mixture of what in other games are disciplines, effects, rituals, and gifts. Mummies are meant to be powerful and unusual. Between their lack of flaws and their strange magic, they are.

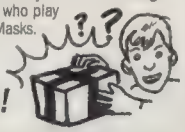
Drizzt. Errtu. Bvrip!

Thousands of words like these and more are yours to read, courtesy of the bestselling creator of the Dark Elf Trilogy. Spend an Hour with R.A. Salvatore and find out how he does it — and maybe even what strange combination of consonants is next.

Fool Your Friends!

Hide From Your Enemies!

Strap on your favorite face covering and search the entire con for clues to solve the riddle. Two days of fun and intrigue await those who play A Game of Masks.



Win prizes!

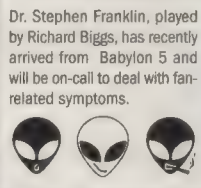
Bag-o-FREE-Stuff

There's no telling what you'll end up with when you start filling your swag bag. Pick one up and test the tensile strength of its welded seams by cramming it full of a ton of cool free junk you get at the booths.

goodies galore!

Hey, ALIENS — the Doctor is IN

Dr. Stephen Franklin, played by Richard Biggs, has recently arrived from Babylon 5 and will be on-call to deal with fan-related symptoms.



Wholesale Irony Treasure

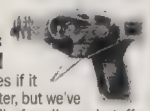
Tired of fighting the bad guy only to find the doo dad that would've turned the tide of battle **"after"** the fact? Get it before it's placed: Holy Avengers slated for lich-ridden crypts, Rings of Fire Resistance on the way to Red Dragon lairs and much, much more.

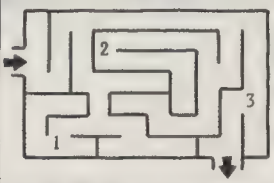
Adopt a d12

Open your heart - and your dicebag to one of these poor, neglected dodecahedrons. Swing a greataxe. Play a barbarian. Make up uses.

Doo-Dads, Gewgaws & Tchotchkes!

Call 'em collectibles if it makes you feel better, but we've just got booths full of really cool stuff. Movie props, unaired TV episodes, Morocco Mole necklaces and enough memorabilia to choke a kewpie doll.





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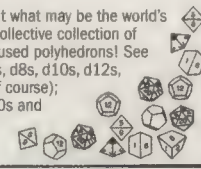

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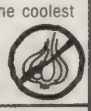

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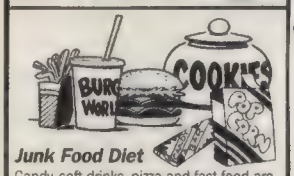

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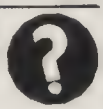

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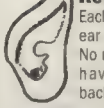

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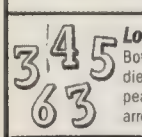

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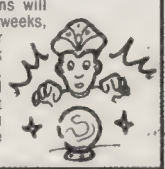

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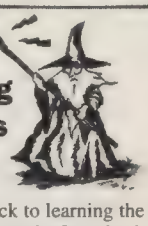

There's no trick to learning the basic rules of magic. Just check out chapter ten in the Player's Handbook. It's only eleven pages —you'll have it nailed in no time.

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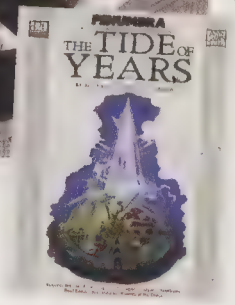
The cool thing about mummies is that they are sort of the antivampires. As servants of Osiris, their power depends on their maintaining Ma'at, balance, a code bestowed by the god that rules against actions born of anger and jealousy or doing harm without just cause. Mummies with a high balance are very powerful when it comes to preserving the natural order, but it isn't an easy code to keep.

When it comes to straight fighting, mummies lack the vampire and werewolf abilities to shrug off most forms of damage, but they can use their magic paths to cast a quick healing ritual on themselves. Also, mummies have five additional Health Levels beyond Incapacitated. They are hard to kill for good, and only magic, loss of will to live, thermonuclear assault (yes, it is in the book), suicide, the inability of the spirit to reenter the physical body of the mummy after it has been chased out, or a legendary poison called the Elixir of Oblivion can put a permanent end to a mummy.



Mummy is not a complete rule book by itself. You will need one of the other *World of Darkness* base books to play, but by leaving out all the basic rules, the authors were able to put in a ton of supplemental information that would have otherwise had to wait for another book. Thus, the chapter "The Lands of Faith" starts from the beginning of the Egyptian underworld and details its aspects right up to the current crisis. It covers the history of the mummies, their god, their beliefs, and the evolution of their mission. There are write-ups of the important sites of the Middle East. The write-ups of the cities, countries, and holy sites of Arabia, Egypt, Northern Africa, and Persia seem well researched and useful to a chronicle set in those places.

The "Secrets of the Scribe" chapter gives information for Game Masters (GMs). The focus is how to run a game rather than what to run. GMs are told how to create personal mythologies within chronicles. There are the usual nods to organizing themes, moods, conflicts, and motivations, but there is also help in running a campaign about the war between the universal personifications of Order and Chaos. There is advice for making wrongs right and putting it all together into a game players will love. This chapter will excite Game Masters about the possibility of running a mummy game.

So far, *Mummy: The Resurrection* is not its own game line. It is the gem of books planned for the Year of the Scarab release, but the other supplements are all in other lines. Of course, *Kindred of the East* started as a one shot and became its own line, so sales may lead to greater things for this *Mummy*. It would certainly deserve them.

Away from the Middle East and into the magic realms of players' own imaginings, there is a new program out from Thought Guild Inc. called *Realm Overseer 3D*. The program allows you to view, manipulate, and travel Fantasy worlds, towns, and dungeons. While capable of standing alone, *RO3D* works best as an add-on to the popular electronic mapping program *Campaign Cartographer 2* and to the *Forgotten Realms Interactive Atlas*, both of which are available from Pro-Fantasy Software Ltd.

What *RO3D* does is provide another level of realism for *CC2*-based maps by letting players literally "go inside" them just as they would the world of a computer game. The program allows real-time dynamic map overview/manipulation, which basically means that it can be turned and tilted and zoomed in on and out of to your heart's content. It lets the user travel across the map's surface in first-person perspective. The weather can be set to several different conditions, as can the dynamic illumination from Sun and Moon. The program will convert old 2-D maps from *CC2* and *FRIA*, or it will allow the creation of new, full 3-D maps with *CC2*.

Part of the problem in any game is getting the players to visualize the Fantasy world into which they have been plunged. *RO3D* helps players do this with realism as great as the latest developments in computer 3-D graphics. Paper- and-dice RPG GMs simply have not had the tools to help their players visualize the Fantasy that computer RPG makers have had. Game Masters wanting to use computers to enhance their players' role-playing experience have few options besides preparing the world information on the computer and then printing it out. *RO3D* lets GMs create worlds in the same 3-D view that the game programmers get. Maps as large as 5,000 fully textured 3-D models with 100 to 300 polygons each can be created. Plus, the program allows GMs to create self-executable 3-D world submaps to send to players, or 3-D Java applets for their Web sites.

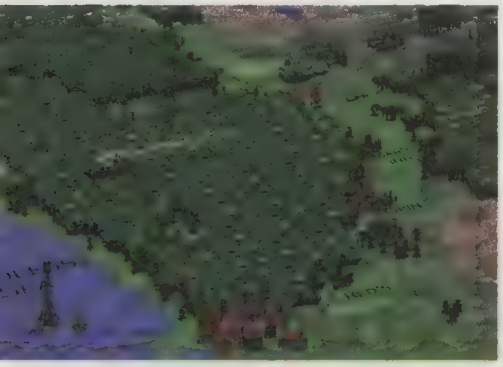
Realm Overseer 3D and *Campaign Cartographer 2* together make a fantastically powerful tool for envisioning a Fantasy game world. The only word of caution is that the worlds are still only as good as the imagination that creates them. Templates and basic maps come with the program, but still, a user's fantasy map will not draw itself. Also, the first-person viewing in *RO3D* is no more detailed than the map programmed for it. For example, if the map shows "castle," then *RO3D* will put a beautiful 3-D castle there, but unless the "castle" is linked to a submap that shows its interior, the first-person view of *RO3D* will not take you inside the castle's rooms; it will only let you float

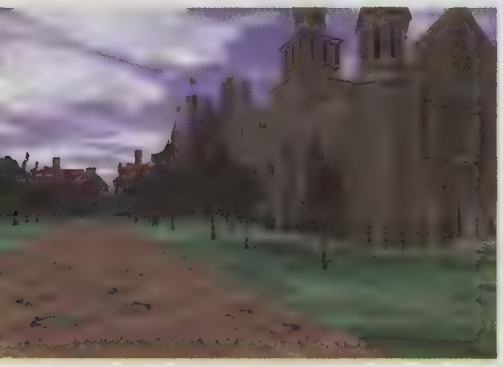
around and over the structure. Still, as gamers try to bridge the gap between the realism of computer RPGs and the flexibility of paper-and-dice RPGs, *RO3D* is a big step forward.

And speaking of computer RPGs, Human Head Studios has released a multiplayer add-on to its game of computer melee combat. *Rune: The Halls of Valhalla* is either an add-on that expands the original *Rune* game or stands alone as its own game for vicious multiplayer battles via LAN or the Internet.

There are two new multiplayer modes: Arena and HeadBall. Arena is like *Fight Club* with Vikings. And Mongols. And Snake Berserkers. And Valkyries. The Basic Arena is set up for one-on-one combat, but some maps and servers allow for larger teams. Players equip their characters with weapons and shields, then wait in line to enter the arena. A number floating above the character's head signifies its turn. Once in the arena, it is up to the player to make sure his character is the last one standing. If the character lives, its full health and all its equipment are restored for its next battle.

HeadBall is the NBA for Vikings. The teams' task is to score points by tossing the heads of their opponents through the arena's goals.





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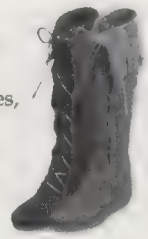

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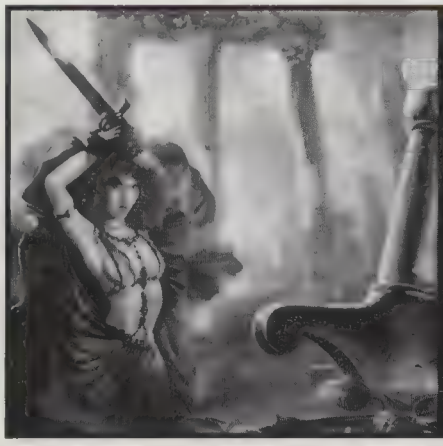

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Once all teams are on the map, a countdown begins. Players may move their characters to the location they believe will give them the best starting advantage, but they can't damage the other characters yet. Once the gong sounds, the melee begins. Players can either use a defensive style to slow the progress of their opponents, or they can go for the killing blow, trying to take the enemy's head off. When a head is severed, any character can pick it up and run for the goals placed around the map. Some maps have goals that can be used by any character to score; others have team-specific goals. Some maps have multiple goals where each scores a different number of points per head. On these maps, distant goals or those requiring trick shots are worth many more points. There is also an option to allow "limb scoring": each limb tossed into a goal scores one point.

The online multiplayer play in *R:HoV* has access to all the original maps and characters in *Rune* as well as new content. New in-game music and 33 new maps are available in all game modes, including seven maps designed by fans. Most importantly, there is a new combat style with added defensive options. Using this style, characters can deflect thrown weapons and make improved use of shields.

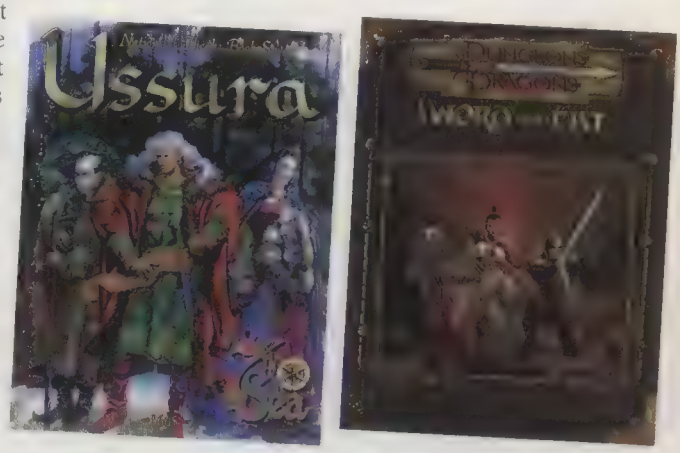
Gamers are still waiting for the great hand-to-hand, melee-based, first-person shooter. *Oni* is the closest that the industry has come. *Rune*, in its basic game, included too much repetition to be a great game. But now with *R:HoV*, *Rune* is closer to that title. Multiplayer solves a multitude of sins, and it improves *Rune* more than most.

While we're talking about melee, *Sword and Fist: A Guidebook to Fighters and Monks* is a new supplement from Wizards of the Coast for Third Edition *Dungeons & Dragons*. The book contains new feats and skills, prestige classes, and backgrounds to improve the lot of fighters and monks, both in character creation and in actual battle. The book also contains a number of new weapons and magic items.

The new skills include Close-Quarters Fighting, Dirty Fighting, Off-Hand Parry, Remain Conscious, and Throw Anything. The prestige classes include Cavalier, Devoted Defender, Drunken Master, Master of Chains, Master Samurai, Tribal Protector, and several more. The organizations have a *Greyhawk* bent, but they can be tweaked to fit most any campaign. The strategies are good and might give DMs and players ideas for tricks and tactics. The equipment includes Oriental weapons like the war fan and three-section staff, Fantasy weapons like the bladed gauntlet or whip dagger, and some nonhuman weapons like the orcish shotput. At the end of the book are maps of a border tower, an elven canopy tower, a lighthouse keep, a gnome bridge keep, a dwarven plateau castle, a bailey castle, a gladiatorial arena, and a monk's temple compound.

As in any supplement of this type, readers want something they can pick up and use immediately with their campaign or their character. Theory is nice, but players want crunchy bits that they can put to work. *Sword and Fist* has these. There is no *AD&D* party in the world that lacks a fighter, and any of those long-suffering characters will find something to help them in this book.

The latest supplement from Atlas Games' *Penumbra* line is *The Tide of Years*, an adventure scenario for the D20 System, published under the Open Gaming License and D20 System Trademark License. In the adventure, a nation is falling into ruin because its most treasured artifact has been stolen from its sacred



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altar. The artifact is a temporal crystal capable of controlling time itself. The guilt-ridden spirit of a dead priest is the only hope to recover the crystal and return the nation to glory. The spirit recruits a group of traveling heroes, but has to send them to a sunken temple through dangerous waters to where the crystal lies. To make matters worse, the crystal has transformed the surrounding forest into a prehistoric landscape.

ToY is an opening for GMs who want to add time travel into their campaigns, either just this once or as a campaign theme. The adventure includes time traps the players must think their way through, and dangerous new monsters for them to fight or outwit. The book has rules, spells, and a deity for a new clerical Domain of Time. The maps are designed using *Campaign Cartographer 2* and are available for download from the Atlas Games Web site, which means that if you get *Realm Overseer 3D* you can travel them in first-person view.

From a brand-new world to a stunningly complete one, *Ussura: The Nations Of Théah, Vol. VII* for AEG's *7th Sea* universe is now out. The book details Théah's least known and most magically active nation. If the other nations of Théah are civilization, then Ussura is outside them. As *7th Sea*'s stand-in for Russia, Ussura is behind the other nations in all the ways that modern readers think of as civilized. Life is lived in Ussura as it has been for hundreds of years. Politics, as it is practiced in other nations, does not exist in Ussura. The land itself is a character, and humans live upon it at its sufferance.

The supplement contains the history and background of Ussura with entries for the government, culture, and religion of the nation. There are details on each of the five provinces, including major nonplayer characters who inhabit them. There are also sections on the Cossacks and the Gypsies, called Kosars and Fhideli in the *7th Sea* universe. Twenty pages in the center of the supplement are devoted to detailed histories of the country's major NPCs. Statistics for these characters, as well as GM-only secrets about them, are in the back.

The crunchy bits are in the third chapter with rules for using the *7th Sea* tarot in creating Ussuran characters, new rules, and new animals for using the Ussuran shape-changing magic, plus new backgrounds, knacks, skills, advantages, and equipment. There are also three new Swordsman's schools, only one of which is actually recognized by the international Swordsman's Guild, and then only sometimes, as its followers fight with axes. The other two schools are for bows and for wrestling.

Ussura is portrayed in the other supplements as a frightening, magical, and dangerous place. This supplement does nothing to dispel that reputation. It is good stuff for GMs who want to take their campaign to a "lost" part of the world, or for players who want their characters to be from someplace truly different.

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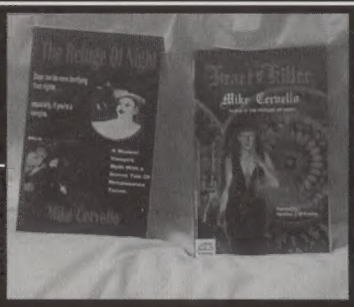

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GREGORY FROST is a Fantasy author living near Philadelphia. His Fantasy novels, *Lyrec, Tain,* and *Remscela* (the latter two under the title *Crimson Spear*) have recently been reprinted in e-book and print-on-demand formats by Time/Warner's iPublish Division. He has been a university administrator, teacher, and television researcher. He is currently at work on a novel, *Fitcher's Brides,* for Tor Books. His most recent short work, "The Girlfriends of Dorian Gray," was published in Stephen Jones and David Sutton's anthology *Dark Terrors 5.*

HARLAN ELLISON has won more awards in the world of imaginative literature than any other living author. He has been included in the *Best American Short Stories;* his "City on the Edge of Forever" segment of the original *Star Trek* has been called one of the 100 greatest moments in the history of American television by *TV Guide;* he has written 75 books, won Audie and Grammy nominations and awards for his spoken word recordings, and this latest of his more than 1,700 published essays, columns, articles, and short stories was written to ring in the New Millennium with a note of hopeful fantasy.

One of the 1999 finalists for the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer, **JAMES VAN PELT** teaches high school and college English in western Colorado. His fiction has appeared in, among other places, *Analog, Asimov's,* and *Weird Tales.* Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling have included his stories in the honorable mention list of *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror* as has Gardner Dozois in *The Year's Best Science Fiction.* When he's not teaching, writing, or raising kids, he hunts for an agent to represent his first novel. His wife and three sons think he tells a pretty good bedtime story.

LOIS TILTON's latest novels are the vampire fantasy epic *Darkspawn* and *Written in Venom,* where Loki tells his own side of the story. Her previous appearance in *Realms* was entitled "Chapter of the Coming Forth by Night," with Noreen Doyle.

DAVID LEE SUMMERS is an astronomer with New Mexico State University, editor of the semi-professional magazine *Hadrosaur Tales,* and an author. David is also the editor of the anthology magazine *Voces: An Altar of Stories,* produced annually as part of the acclaimed Border Book Festival. His second novel, *Children of the Old Stars,* is currently available in a trade paperback edition from Hardsauer Productions. His short fiction has been accepted in such markets as *Outer Darkness, The Vampire's Crypt, Drawing Blood, Parchment Symbols,* and *Story Rules.*

STEVEN POPKES lives in Hopkinton, Massachusetts, where, with the help of his wife and four-year-old son, he is attempting to build a farm on two acres of land. His stories have appeared sporadically in *Asimov's, Fantasy and Science Fiction* and, now, in *Realms of Fantasy.* "The Color Winter" was a Nebula finalist and he was a co-author on the *Future Boston* anthology. He has been a house builder, a whitewater rafting guide, a morgue technician, conservation agent, and a researcher on the neurophysiology of dogs. By day he is now a software engineer. By nights he writes stories.

Born in New York City in 1946, **ALAN DEAN FOSTER** was raised in Los Angeles. His writing career began when August Derleth bought a long Lovecraftian letter he had written and published it as a short story in the biannual magazine, *The Arkham Collector.* Foster's short fiction has appeared in all the major SF magazines as well as in original anthologies and several "Best of the Year" compendiums. He has published five collections of short work. His first novel, *The Tar-Aiym Krang,* was published by Ballantine Books in 1972. Foster's work includes hard science fiction, fantasy, and horror as well as detective, western, historical, and contemporary fiction. He has produced the novel versions of many films, including such well known productions as *Star Wars,* the first three *Alien* films, and *Alien Nation.* The Fosters live in Prescott, Arizona. Their house is built of rock salvaged from a turn-of-the-century miners' brothel; the furnishings feature the ensorcelled chair of the nefarious Dr. John Dee, and the inhabitants include assorted dogs, cats, fish, and several hundred houseplants as well as visiting javelina, porcupines, eagles, red-tailed hawks, coyotes, and bobcats.

GARY LIPPINCOTT began his career as a freelance illustrator shortly after receiving his BFA degree from the Maryland Institute. He has developed, over the years, a feel for "old-world" craftsmanship that sets him apart from many of his Fantasy/Sci Fi art contemporaries. His artwork appears in children's books, textbooks, book jackets, and jigsaw puzzles. He has exhibited at Arts Worcester, University of Massachusetts Medical, Bush Galleries, Cambridge Gallery, and Northampton Center for the Arts, to name a few. He resides in Spencer, Massachusetts with his wife and two children, where they own and operate a 128-acre horse farm called Seven Springs Farm. When he is not painting or repairing fences, he can be found playing piano, practicing magic, or searching for gnomes and fairies.

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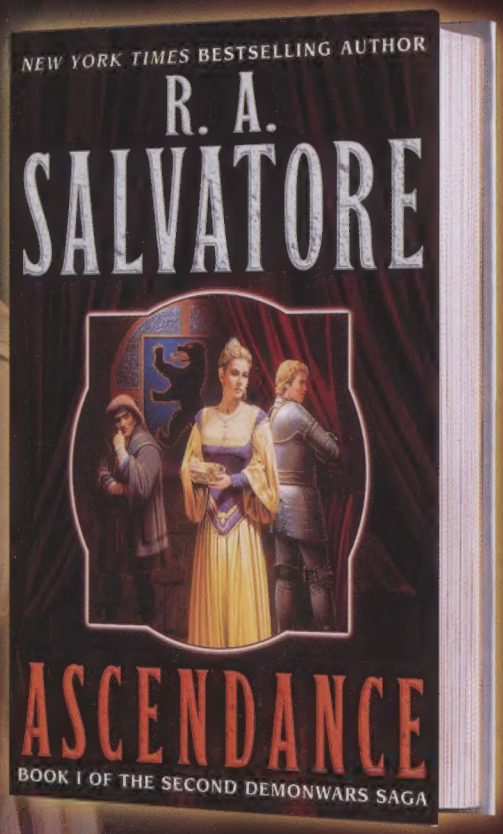

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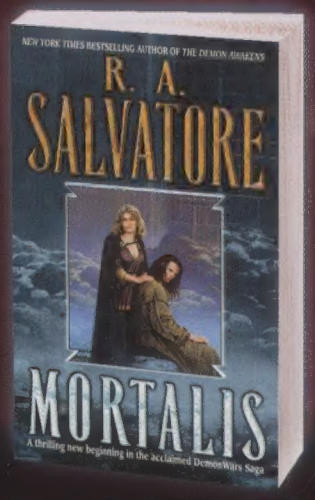
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